

By Gabriele Crognale, P.E.

## EMS AUDITOR COURSES AND OTHER DELIGHTS: A BUYERS MARKET

Thinking we had reached a writers block for ideas to report on from the Front Lines, some recent experiences lend themselves well as a case study for the many choices available to individuals seeking additional training in ISO 14001 and ISO 9001 matters. Our focus this month is to provide our readers with a wide a selection as possible to help them make the right choice for their needs and (possibly) limited budgets.

As far as we know, the only EMS and QMS courses that are accredited by ANSI-RAB are the Lead Auditor courses provided by RAB-accredited course providers that can be found on the RAB Web site ([www.rabnet.com](http://www.rabnet.com)). At last count, there are over 20 such course providers with more in cue as this field matures. Our focus in this article is not to review these providers, but to provide readers with an informational database of additional course providers, some of which may be in your own backyards.

These additional groups, from non-profits such as ASQ and various local quality groups, to local community colleges and universities usually provide courses to supplement the lead auditor training courses provided by the RAB-accredited folks. What can you receive, and are these additional venues a value, you may ask? A quick review of several of these providers shows that implementation and internal auditing courses are listed, sometimes at reduced costs to members. Other groups have initiated various collaboratives to provide ISO 14001 and ISO 9001 implementation assistance to a select group of participants at a somewhat reduced cost, such as is the case with several emerging programs in Massachusetts. The key to each of these alternative service providers is whether their times, dates and cost per participant are of value to the person or persons from an organization who had a need to take a particular course or workshop. That is where you have to do your homework and decide what option is best for you.

### The choices: Heinz 57 varieties

Let's look at some considerations a potential course participant may need to evalu-

ate as they decide "einy-meanie-minie-moe" in choosing their course provider. In some organizations that are looking to put in place a comprehensive EMS program with a solid auditor bench, their decision-makers may decide to invest sizable budget amounts within a specified time horizon to get this program moving. For such folks, they may decide to go with an RAB-accredited course provider for the whole package: implementation, internal auditor and lead auditor, especially if they are comfortable with the firm and/or instructor chosen to provide the training. They may also see value in having their staff venture off-site to a public offering to hone their skills. The added benefit to an off-site public offering is the possibility of learning through the interaction of other course participants. You will get no argument from me on that point. There is also some value in having such courses offered in chunks of time to minimize staff disruption.

If, however, organizations may be strapped financially somewhat, or are not being forced to flash-track their EMS program, they may want to consider taking one type of course, such as the lead auditor course, from the RAB-accredited folks, assimilate that knowledge, and perhaps look at the alternatives for a slower paced opportunity to hone up on EMS skills, such as implementing their EMS program or internal auditing, which does not need to be offered through a RAB-accredited course provider. With these alternate service providers, courses or workshops could be offered over 2, 3 or more days, either on-site or in a public setting, such as a sponsor company or a university, or be offered as an accredited continuing ed course one night a week for 8 to 10 week or so. Of course, each purveyor would have a different time schedule and offering format, and the prospective course participant would have to determine whether such dates, locations and times would suit their needs. One group that offers such courses is ASQ, depending upon the focus of their regional chapters. One such chapter with which we are familiar is [www.asqmv.org](http://www.asqmv.org). Their member company employees have the opportunity to sign up

## THE FRONT LINE

### Quick little primer to help you make an informed choice for which EMS course(s) to take and by whom:

1. How many employees will you need to provide EMS training to? What is your time frame and how much can you do yourselves on site? What does your training budget look like in 2002 and beyond?
2. Check your referrals: what did other folks in your network have to say about a particular course or course provider? Were they satisfied, or did they feel they did not get their money's worth? Would they use the provider or instructor again? Can they share some noteworthy anecdotes about their training experiences?
3. You've done your homework and narrowed down your choices. There are still points to consider. Do you sign up for one of the course providers listed on the RAB Web site, or do you opt for on-site training? If you choose the latter, who will provide this training? A course provider, a non-profit, or boutique training firm? In any of these situations, the bottom line is that you need to research that the instructor will be, and what value you will receive in any of the choices before you. Let's evaluate this point further.
4. You sign up for an RAB-listed course provider. Is the training local, or do you have to include travel, meals and lodging expenses? Who's the instructor, and what do they bring to the table? Who else has signed up? Is there potential networking value in attending? What is the course venue? Is it being held at a convenient hotel with ample training space, or is it being offered at the trainer's office. If so, will you be comfortable with that arrangement? What backup plan do you have should the course be canceled?
5. You sign up for an on-site course. Can you bring on additional participants, and how much will it cost? Again, you need to evaluate the instructor. What are their credentials, and what value do they bring?
6. You sign up for a public offering with a non-profit organization. Again, you need to evaluate the instructor. Many of these organizations list the instructor's biography on their Web site, so this research may be a little easier. But, that's not to say that you should stop there you're your research. Who else has signed up, and like the previous public offering example, is there potential networking value in attending? Is the offering over a period of days, or 2 or more hours a week for 8 to 10 weeks? This option might be attractive to companies with limited budgets who would like to partake in advanced ISO training. Many of these non-profits offer ISO 14001 implementation and internal auditing courses at very reasonable rates.
7. What requirements are you seeking to fulfill? Are you seeking ISO 14001 auditor registration? If so, your only choice to date is to take an approved RAB-accredited EMS Lead Auditor course.
8. If, however, you are not seeking RAB credentials, you are under no obligation to take courses from these providers, although you may choose to do so. In these situations, you can choose to take whatever courses you feel are most appropriate for you in whatever venue makes most sense and can be justified by your Purchasing Manager.

for these courses at local sponsor companies at a reduced rate, although their courses are very reasonably priced.

Another venue is the college and university system that includes private and community colleges, as well as various collaboratives. Some of the colleges with which we are familiar that offer these services include: [www.tri-c.cc.oh.us](http://www.tri-c.cc.oh.us), and [www.merrimack.edu](http://www.merrimack.edu). Again, where such offerings can provide value are whether

the offering times, locations and dates are convenient, and whether the mix of participants are varied to provide the nucleus of value-added class interaction. One key item that should be inherent in any course offering choice is that it is the instructor, or in many cases, the facilitator, who makes or breaks the class or workshop offering. If the instructor teaching the class materials is not aptly qualified with real-world experience to teach the class,

you will not receive value for the course(s) you take, regardless of the tuition paid. It does pay to do your homework and try to review their work if possible.

### One company's perspective: the phantom interviewee

I posed the question of what a company looks for in choosing an ISO course provider to a Quality Director of a large manufacturing company. This individual was frank in his offering of anecdotal information, but did not want to be identified. In choosing a course provider, and he has his favorite which we will describe, he looks for several key considerations. These include:

1. Has a well-established network through his ISO registrar contacts. He also relies on the opinions of his colleagues in industry who have taken various ISO courses from various listed course providers.
2. He likes to attend and send his work colleagues to training sessions in those geographic areas where key customers and suppliers are located, a conscious business strategy on his part.
3. In another business consideration, he looks to see where the pressure point is, and who among his customers are mandating such courses. He then solicits their input for what is out there in the way of course value.
4. If his supervisor or other management rep is specifying that he or others will take courses, he will network locally to determine what choices he has available, and begin the interview process.
5. I asked him whether he used the Internet to conduct this research, and he replied that the Internet is a good business tool.
6. He also feels that there is value in taking an internal on-site course, just as there is in taking a public course, it's all a matter of preference at the time.

As we have found in our discussion with this gentleman and in our own expe-

## THE FRONT LINE

rience from being on both sides of the training fence over the years, preparation and diligence are two of the main ingredients to guarantee a successful training experience. **PE**

*Gabriele Crognale, P.E., the founder of MCG & Associates, is affiliated with Merrimack College and Weston & Sampson. He has over 27 years in the environmental field, and specializes in ISO 14001 implementation and related training services. He is on the Advisory Panel for Maintenance Management, and is the Editor of Environmental Management Strategies: The 21st Century Perspective, published by Prentice-Hall (1999). He may be reached at 978-764-4839, 978-837-5172, or iso14k@ureach.com.*