

This article first appeared in the May 2001 issue of *International Environmental Systems Update*. For more information, please visit this Web site: www.ceem.com.

NGO Task Group Starts with a Sputter

Although Technical Committee 207 reached a monumental decision late last year when it voted to create a formal task group that would report to the Chairman's Advisory Group (CAG) on matters concerning nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), officials say the group is getting off to a very slow start.

According to Ahmad Hussein, the TC 207 secretary, the deadline for countries to nominate experts and participants to the task group expired May 1, and only two countries have submitted nominees as of May 3. The lack of participation or interest from member countries on the issue provides further evidence of the disconnect that exists between NGOs and TC 207 members—the very reason the group was formed. Officials are unclear on how to proceed with the issue, but action is expected during the TC 207 plenary in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, July 1-8.

“I'm very discouraged about the NGO Task Group comments and the fact that only two countries have nominees to participate,” Hussein told *IESU*. “I think what we'll have to do is open up the floor of the TC [during the plenary] and invite members and liaison organizations to send their nominees to the first meeting, and then go from there. It's a very unfortunate start and quite disappointing after all of the work we've put into this issue.”

Indeed, TC 207 has debated the role of NGOs in the standards development process since the committee was formed in 1993. In the early years of the committee, several formidable NGOs were involved in the ISO 14000 development process, including groups such as Friends of the Earth, the National Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club and WWF International, to name a few.

But a number of those major players dropped out of the process after relatively short periods of activity, citing a lack of funding and a limited ability to affect the standards development process. To address this, the TC 207 leadership developed a high-level group of experts called the NGO Contact Group in 1998 to examine why NGO involvement within TC 207 had fallen significantly since 1996. The contact group spent two years

meeting with dozens of NGOs in several countries, ultimately recommending that TC 207 form the new NGO Task Group to encourage more NGO participation.

The committee agreed after considerable debate last year, but already, participation is sluggish.

To find out more information or to become involved in the NGO Task Group, contact your national member body or Ahmad Husseinia at tel: 416-747-2473; or by e-mail: huseinia@csa.ca.