Cambodian school children put EMS basics into practice to preserve Angkor site

by Roger Frost, Press and Communication Manager, ISO Central Secretariat

*Cambodian primary school children, who have been trained in the basics of the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, on a visit to an Angkor temple site to implement refuse management solutions. Guidance is provided by Ms. Seng Sothira, of the APSARA EMS unit. Observing are Mr. Tan Sambon (*right*), Deputy Director General of the Cambodian Government's APSARA Authority, and Mr. Roger Frost (centre), Press and Communication Manager, ISO Central Secretariat.*

Cambodian primary school children are playing an innovative role in the implementation of an ISO 14001-based environmental management system (EMS) as one of the measures to protect the world-famous architectural, historical and cultural site of Angkor from deterioration caused by increasing tourism-related development.

In 2004, Angkor attracted 600 000 tourists – 100 times more than 10 years before. The increasing number of visitors, related road and hotel construction, and the corresponding increase in waste, is a threat to the structure of the hundreds of temples and other architectural vestiges at Angkor, which was in 1992 declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

The Cambodian Government Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA), with the support of Japanese institutions, is undertaking a programme to protect the environment around these World Cultural Heritage sites to preserve them for future generations.

As well as well-known temples like Angkor Wat and Bayon, Angkor is also home to some 23 000 Cambodian villagers. Traditionally, they earn their livelihood by agriculture, but growing numbers are supplementing their income as vendors of souvenirs and refreshments at the temple sites.

One of the measures currently being experimented is to involve the children of the villagers in practical environmental measures. Children from two primary schools located in the Angkor area have been trained by APSARA's EMS unit to apply the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle on which ISO 14001 is based to waste management at their schools and two temple sites. The programme reflects the wish of the Cambodian authorities to build an EMS from the base up, thoroughly involving the local population.

The Cambodian authorities were introduced to the EMS concept and ISO 14001 by Professor Yoshiaki Ishizawa of Sophia University, Japan, one of the world's foremost historical specialists on Angkor and head of the first UNESCO Angkor research team. He also leads the Sophia University International Angkor Mission, which hosted a recent international symposium in Siem Reap, Cambodia, on the sustainable development of the Angkor site. Included in the programme were presentations made by APSARA on the implementation of the ISO 14001 EMS at Angkor and environmental education in Angkor schools.

ISO Secretary-General Alan Bryden commented: "The Angkor EMS programme is a striking illustration of the flexibility of the ISO 14001 approach, which can not only help industrial sectors to improve their environmental performance but also encourage the development of sustainability in such an important service sector as tourism. In addition, it is a matter for pride that ISO 14001 is one of the tools used to preserve Angkor, which is part of the world's cultural heritage, and also a matter for optimism to note that the children of Angkor are being trained in the rudiments of ISO 14001 in order to become actors of their own destiny."