

# CROKE PARK STAYS AHEAD OF ITS COMPETITORS WITH ISO 20121 CERTIFICATION FROM SGS IRELAND

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Croke Park has become one of the first stadiums in the world to achieve certification to the ISO 20121 Event Sustainability Management System International Standard. Croke Park holds up to 82,300 spectators at Gaelic football and hurling matches, hosts around 50 major events annually, with a combined total of 1.6 million visitors, and is headquarters to the Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA). In addition to adopting and promoting sustainability principles across all its business and community activities, Croke Park is dedicated to supporting activities which enrich the culture of the nation and further Gaelic ideals including sport, the Irish language, music and dance and the values of the GAA, its members and volunteers.

ISO 20121 is a sustainable management system promoted by the London 2012 Olympic Games Organising Committee (LOCOG). The standard describes the building blocks that will help an event organisation continue to be financially successful, become more socially responsible, and reduce its environmental impact.

The standard also differentiates event organisations in the marketplace and improves their chances of winning new business. In time, event clients, sponsors, local authorities and other key stakeholders will likely choose to work with organisations that have implemented ISO 20121.



### PUTTING SUSTAINABILITY AT THE HEART OF THE BUSINESS

Croke Park was awarded the certification after an audit by SGS Ireland in 2012 for achieving the highest standards in sustainable event management, and for demonstrating its commitment to continuous improvements in the stadium's sustainability record and showing that sustainability lies at the centre of all its activities.

In fact, Croke Park has been at the forefront of sustainability since 2008, taking a holistic approach to stadium operations by developing and implementing a range of sustainability initiatives and projects.

Certification to BS 8901 in 2010 followed ISO 14001 certification in 2009, and the stadium's current sustainability initiative, "Greener. On and Off the Pitch," which recently won the Chambers Ireland's Corporate Social Responsibility Award for 'Excellence in Environment' 2012.

### MAKING THE TRANSITION FROM BS 8901 TO ISO 20121

To implement ISO 20121 successfully, events organisations must follow five steps:

- Identify issues where they make an economic, social or environmental impact
- Define performance objectives and targets
- Create an action plan
- Allocate resources to the plan
- Engage staff, suppliers, top management and the local community and ask how they can support the action plan
- Monitor and evaluate progress.

"We viewed ISO 20121 as a natural progression," says Tracy Bunyan, Events and Operations Co-ordinator with responsibility for Sustainability. "Croke Park achieved certification against BS8901 in 2010 and we always intended to look at the ISO 20121 certification when it was released and to go for that conversion. It was the perfect fit for the stadium to apply for it."

"We'd already made a lot of strides around our environmental management system:

- Reducing electrical usage in the stadium by 31% since 2008.
- Reducing gas by 29%.
- Reducing water by 28% since 2010.
- Achieving a 62% recycling rate.

Could they refer a social or economical target as well? It's seems to be all about the environment...

We looked at the draft ISO 20121 standard and realised we were 85% of the way there with BS 8901."

"This year we focused on streamlining our objectives under three headings all our stakeholders could easily understand. So we developed three thematic areas based on an Achieve, Reduce, Communicate (ARC) model. We knew we were achieving our targets for ISO 14001 and BS 8901. We knew we were making the required reductions. Now we needed to communicate the sustainability message to all our staff and the people who come into the stadium."

"Now our contractors and patrons know what ARC means. And in those three letters we capture what we're trying to achieve going forward."

## **WORKING WITH SGS IRELAND**

"SGS helped us at the start of our sustainability journey with ISO 14001 and again with BS 8901," says Alan Gallagher, Head of Stadium Operations. "It's more than a client/contractor relationship. They're very helpful, very straightforward. We're in regular contact with them and they give great advice and guidance. SGS' experience has guided us to how we become best-in-class going forward."

SGS Ireland saw Croke Park's ISO 20121 certification as a conversion process up from BS 8901. The ISO standard has two new clauses: the requirement for an events organisation to demonstrate its leadership, and the requirement to show how it plans to leave behind a legacy.

From the auditing perspective this meant focusing on these differences between the standards, looking at how Croke Park has demonstrated leadership and whether it considered leaving a legacy for each of the events it runs.

## **TWO STANDOUT EXAMPLES IN THE AUDIT**

The SGS auditor identified two standout examples of best practice in the audit. First, Croke Park's extensive community engagement programme demonstrating its commitment to leadership and legacy. For example, in 2011, Croke Park in conjunction with the stadium catering contractors provided seasonal employment to 81 local people. In so doing, Croke Park are providing opportunities for young people to stay in the country, at a time when many are considering emigrating.

In addition, the Community Liaison officer has built close ties with local residents, councils, Gardaí and TD's, and runs forums on issues such as Community Policing in communities within the vicinity of the stadium. Further afield in their supply chain, Croke Park ensures it buys all its meat from within Ireland. This way, it can prove the supply chain is properly screened.

What's more, Croke Park captures all the learning from each event and incorporates it in a knowledge bank for everyone to use going forward.

## **GREENER. ON AND OFF THE PITCH**

The SGS auditor also identified a second standout in the audit. Croke Park has been at the heart of Irish sporting life and events for over a hundred years and their "Greener. On and off the pitch" initiative sets out to show its commitment to innovation and best practice to maintain its position as a world leader in venue sustainability.

The project focuses Croke Park on key areas such as:

- Maintaining its position as being one of the most sustainable sports venues in the world by a collaborative approach with key stakeholders involved in its events
- Increasing recycling at Croke Park with a focus of achieving zero landfill by 2014
- Continuing to reduce electricity, gas and water consumption
- Developing effective and consistent communication tools to communicate the sustainability message to staff, stakeholders, patrons and the public. All key staff and stakeholders are involved in implementing and achieving the sustainability objectives and outcomes at the stadium. This is achieved through a number of strategic and practical methods such as:
  - Environmental & Sustainability Management Group: The ESMG is made up of stadium stakeholders and is the engine for driving sustainable initiatives. This group meets approximately every six weeks
  - Ezines: Quarterly sustainability ezines are compiled and emailed internally to all staff to make them aware of sustainability initiatives
  - Green Boards: Green Boards are located in all canteens and are points of information for all staff to raise awareness and display information relating to sustainability
  - Internal Awareness Training: Staff receive annual sustainability and environmental awareness training. Staff are given the opportunity to offer feedback on sustainability ideas via the ESMG team.
  - Internal Audits: An annual schedule of internal audits has been developed to assess compliance with the Sustainability Management System in Croke Park.

## **BENEFITS OF ISO 20121 GOING FORWARD & THE FUTURE FOR SUSTAINABILITY AT CROKE PARK:**

ISO 20121 challenges “business as usual” and drives creativity and innovation, which gives Croke Park a competitive edge.

“With ISO 20121 we’ve adopted an inclusive approach with all our contractors,” says Tracy Bunyan. “We’re encouraging them to buy in to what we’re doing because it is a collaborative approach. It can’t be just driven by one or two individuals in one or two areas or departments. It needs to be across the board, so everyone is involved.”

“SGS’s experience guided us to how we could consolidate and build on our position going forward,” adds Alan Gallagher. “We were excited about achieving ISO 20121 certification and SGS put two important questions to us: What will be your legacy? What will you as a team leave behind in 20 years time?”

“This has created a whole new sense of how we’re operating. The next step is moving from being objective-driven, to demonstrating full inclusion, to a strategic sustainability plan. Where it used to be a one, two-year roll over, we now have a different mindset.”

“We’ll be looking to formalise our very strong safety features with OHSAS 18001. And by having processes in place we’ll ensure they don’t become person-dependent. Everyone can learn the processes very quickly, and we can maintain and improve it easily.”

“We’ll be looking at how we maintain our position as being one of the most sustainable sports venues in the world,” says Tracy Bunyan. “We’ll look at trying to achieve a zero percent landfill by 2014 based on us achieving an 80% recycling rate this year and continuing on a year to year basis reducing our utilities consumption, and keeping the communications channels open between our staff and our stakeholders, because we have a huge responsibility and a captive audience to whom we can communicate environmental messages.

SGS Lead Auditor Becky Toal adds: “Clearly, Croke Park is doing so much: the job creation, the local schools, the community engagement, the work with the councils - it’s all part of their positioning as leaders. The question now is where do they go from here? Croke Park is head and shoulders above others in leadership. But other stadiums will want to be leaders and Croke Park will have to raise the bar again.”

The final clause in ISO 20121 is on Continual Improvement, and how events organisations must keep going beyond what they have achieved and keep challenging themselves. This links back to leadership and legacy. What is the legacy of the great things they are doing? What are the social, environmental and economical impacts of their sustainability achievements in the long-term? The journey becomes one of finding out how best to monitor and measure sustainability and the continuing issues around legacy and leadership.

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