

## ENVIRONMENT IMPROVEMENT PLANS - GOING BEYOND COMPLIANCE TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY

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Traditionally environmental regulation has generally been prescriptive, relying primarily on statutory approaches to resolve environmental problems. In Victoria, Australia, EPA Victoria, a State Government environmental regulator has adopted an innovative voluntary approach it uses in conjunction with its statutory approaches. This approach has seen many industries it regulates actually achieve results that go far beyond compliance and achieve far more than statutory approaches alone. Faced with some serious conflicts between poorly performing industries and their community neighbours, EPA was finding that a traditional regulatory approach was having limited success. Many enforcement actions often resulted in small penalties and the environmental problems still existed. Faced with a growing groundswell of community concern, EPA decided to try something different. This involved getting everyone with an interest in the issue together, to start listening to each other's issues and concerns and to make plans to improve things. Thus the concept of an environment improvement plan came to be. Environment improvement plans, developed between industries and their community neighbours, become public commitments by these companies to improve their environmental performance. The results have gone beyond original expectations. Many companies have been able to achieve some impressive outcomes, working in much more sustainable ways. The benefits include considerable cost savings, reduction of emissions and waste, improved community confidence and corporate reputation and above all, significant environment improvements. This paper outlines the evolution of the concept, what have been critical success factors, and uses case studies around air emissions including odours, to illustrate the benefits of environment improvement plans.