

## **Environment Agency – e-learning for Water Resources Law.**

### **Background to the work of the Agency**

The Environment Agency is the leading public body for protecting and improving the environment in England and Wales. We have a Vision for the environment: a better place for people and wildlife for present and for future generations.

### **About Water Resources Law**

The Environment Agency has a statutory duty to manage water resources throughout England and Wales. This includes issuing permits to allow people to extract water from watercourses for a variety of industrial, commercial or residential purposes. The decision to issue an abstraction license or not takes into account many factors, which are all defined in a body of statutory and common law that has developed over many years. Therefore, Environment Agency staff dealing with abstraction license requests need to have a thorough understanding of the relevant legislation.

### **Background to the business problem**

Traditionally, inspectors were trained in a classroom course delivered in each of the eight geographical regions of the Environment Agency, but in 2006 it was decided that it would be more efficient to provide the necessary training through the medium of e-learning. This would also offer “just-in-time” training, refresher training and greater consistency of approach.

There were significant risks to the reputation of the Environment Agency if Environment Officers did not understand their legal duties and applied legislation inconsistently. The Environment Agency is also very conscious of its role in promoting the 'green' agenda, and they are trying to minimise the use of workshops that require people to travel long distances.

### **Target audience**

The target audience for this course include new starters working in a number of water management roles throughout the Environment Agency. These are mainly recent graduates, technically able. There would be about 50 Environment Officers per year in a primary target group needing to study the course, and about 100 to 150 additional Officers who would find the content useful.

## The Solution

Most people see training on legislation as being rather daunting and potentially quite tedious. This course wasn't designed to make Environment Officers into experts on relevant law, but to provide an entertaining, engaging way for our staff to acquire a thorough knowledge of key issues and be able to find information quickly and easily when required.

All Environment Officers have access to the Environment Agency's intranet, which includes documents containing a comprehensive summary of relevant legislation and hyperlinks to the primary legislation on other government's web sites.

The course use a story telling metaphor based around a character called Bruno Lake - a private detective. Bruno is presented with a number of typical situations, such as investigating a potential illegal abstraction and deciding whether or not to allow a water company to abstract water from a river during a drought.

Each scenario begins with Bruno at his desk. There is some issue that Bruno must deal with and he encounters problems along the way that require the use of the law. The situation is resolved and Bruno returns to his desk.

Each time Bruno is confronted with a problem the learner is asked to decide which aspect of legislation will help, and is encouraged to find the answer – as they would in a real-life situation. Bruno is always on hand as a help icon that will give them a hint and point them in the right direction.

## Marketing and Promotion

The course has been marketed through three main channels:

- > Direct mail (email) marketing to target audience and their line managers.
- > Highlighting and news items in Easinet (The internal intranet).
- > Regional cascade briefs through the management structure which occur regularly throughout the organisation)

## Delivery

- > The Environment Agency has a organisation wide LMS. This is accessed through the company Intranet, already a well used method of communicating to staff. Usage (and answers to quiz questions) are recorded which provide valuable management information.

## Business Benefit

### **How has the course improved the time it takes to get inspectors to the required level of competency?**

Before the e-learning course officers had to wait up to 12 months before receiving this essential training now they can access it as part of their induction. Around 200 inspectors have taken the course since April 2007.

### **How has the course improved the quality of service?**

Officers on the ground are now able to give better quality advice to those we regulate as they have better knowledge of and more access to information on water resources law. There is less need to refer enquiries on to experienced staff as they now have the legal background themselves.

### **How has the course reduced the cost of training our inspectors?**

Reduced cost of staff time and venue hire and course development time. It has probably saved 20 sessions of trainers time.

### **How has the course added value? (used as refresher training etc?)**

The added value is enabling people to access training when they need it (just-in-time training). It also provided us with an up to date course so people are getting correct information following the introduction of the 2003 water act.

## Best Practice Ideas

### **Nine Top Tips from the Environment Agency**

- > Use the normal management communication cascades to introduce new e-learning courses
- > Expect learners to solve real case study examples as they work through the e-learning
- > Delivery is easiest when an organisation wide Intranet is well established (and used for purposes other than training)
- > Lowering the carbon footprint of training is a powerful argument for investment in e-learning
- > Engage with the target audience early on in the development.
- > Ask them what they want, get them to test it.
- > Keep the learning relevant to the learner
- > Make sure you talk to the client about success criteria and evaluation. You should be able to link these back to the business need
- > During a scenario, always provide a consequence for a wrong decision