

Adrian Kesterson

Director, Expirea Environmental Consultancy



Career file

Qualifications:

CEnv, MIEMA, BSc (Hons)

Your CV:

2014 to date director, Expirea Environmental Consultancy
2012 to 2014 senior environment officer, Industry Regulation Licensing Branch, Department of Environment Regulation, Western Australia
1997 to 2012 inspector, Environment Agency
1992 to 1997 assistant pollution control officer, National Rivers Authority/Environment Agency
1990 to 1992 water sampler, National Rivers Authority
1989 to 1990 environmental laboratory technician, James M Brown
1987 to 1989 laboratory assistant, Norton Advanced Ceramics

Why did you become an environment professional? In the late 1980s the environment was not as high profile as now but it was an area that interested me. I grew up in Stoke-on-Trent, which had coal mines and steelworks and was the centre for the pottery industry so industrial pollution was a local issue. I thought it was a good opportunity to get involved in an emerging sector.

What was your first environment job? I was an environmental laboratory technician for an inorganic chemicals and pigments manufacturer. I undertook workplace environmental and occupational exposure monitoring and analysis. This included stack emissions, effluent treatment plant and worker dust and gas monitoring. It gave me a great introduction to industrial emissions.

How did you get your first role? I was 18 so relied on my high school education, which was strong in sciences. I had two years' experience in a ceramics laboratory nearby and was studying ceramics but I was keen to study chemistry and this role offered me that opportunity.

How did you progress your career? I moved into water pollution control after completing my degree. I moved into industry regulation at the Environment Agency (EA) to focus on the wider environment. I had a two-year development programme with some excellent training, an industrial placement and chemical engineering study. I learned about a range of industrial processes, the wider impacts on all environmental media and how to assess them. This introduced me to environmental management systems and auditing and I decided to switch my professional affiliation from the Royal Society of Chemistry to IEMA. After 15 years, I needed a new challenge and moved to a role for the Western Australian government, which was modernising its approach to industry regulation. I was shocked to find how far behind the UK they were.

What does your current role involve? I decided to have a go at consultancy and moved back to the UK where I had contacts and set up Expirea. My experience is heavily focused on industry regulation so I assist organisations with their regulatory duties and regulator engagement. I prepare environmental permit applications and do audits, for example. The recent cuts at the EA and withdrawal of a lot of the regulatory guidance means businesses cannot easily find advice and legislative interpretation, which is where I can help.

How has your role changed over the past few years? At the EA, my role changed as we moved away from being flexible and pragmatic to a more risk-based regulatory approach. It became much more prescriptive, with tick-box regulation with standard permit templates and compliance forms. I understand the reasons for these changes, and the Environmental Permitting Regulations streamlined permitting quite successfully. However, the role became much less interesting and challenging and most of the agency's experienced industrial regulators have left or retired. Those remaining will find it harder to understand the issues from an industry perspective. The EA has tried to address this by using an industry sector group approach but, with further staff cuts, it just seems to be firefighting now.

What's the best and hardest part of your work? Working for myself, I can keep things simple but remain professional. I enjoy doing things my way without being tied by procedures and management hierarchy. Getting started as a consultant was tough but luckily I had plenty of contacts. Keeping up to date with the ever-changing legislation is a challenge and it is a struggle nowadays to get any guidance from the regulators and governmental departments.

What was the last training course you attended? I undertook Auditmentor's e-learning internal environmental auditor training.

What did you bring back to your job? I was already an experienced IEMA-registered auditor but was looking for a refresher and needed to understand the changes brought in by ISO 14001: 2015.

What is/are the most important skill(s) for your role and why? I must maintain my technical knowledge and learn new things. Being adaptable and able to manage several tasks consecutively is important. Good communication and negotiation skills are also essential. You must be flexible and pragmatic towards clients' needs and timescales.

Where do you see the profession going? There will be more emphasis on sustainability and carbon footprinting, looking at the wider supply chain and taking a cradle-to-grave approach. For businesses to commit to investing in these initiatives there must be clarity and stability and in the current economic uncertainty post Brexit, investing in the future is difficult. Regulatory work will continue to diminish and will be supplemented by assurance schemes.