

This interview was conducted in April 2019 by Sarah Stenzel (Project Coordinator for Management Systems) with Niklas Vath and Bruno Wesch from the Viersen district's building and energy management team. Together with the support of key stakeholders, Niklas Vath and Bruno Wesch successfully set up the municipal energy management system in accordance with ISO 50001 and have been keeping it running very ambitiously ever since.

## Municipal persuaders: energy management in the district of Viersen

Structured energy management also helps local authorities to improve and develop - and not least to save money!

The new municipal guideline, the "[Guideline for the Promotion of Climate Protection Projects in the Municipal Environment](#)", has been in force since this year. With the innovations published there, local authorities and local authority-related companies can receive funding for the development, operation and initial certification of their energy or environmental management systems.



Bruno Wesch (2nd from left) & Niklas Vath (centre) at the GUTcert Network of Excellence Energy 2017

The district of Viersen took this step back in 2017, when this funding was not yet on the cards. Four years earlier, the city and district of Viersen and associated municipalities had already made a commitment to climate protection. An integrated climate protection plan was drawn up, which provided for far-reaching energy-related measures for interface players in the administrations. The approach was systematically and continuously driven forward towards [energy management in accordance with ISO 50001](#), with the result that the district of Viersen is opening its doors to the GUTcert auditor for the third time this year.

The interview is conducted by Niklas Vath and Bruno Wesch from the Viersen district's building and energy management team together with Sarah Stenzel, project coordinator for management systems for (municipal) service providers. Niklas Vath and Bruno Wesch, together with the support of the key players, have successfully set up the municipal energy management system in accordance with ISO 50001 and have been keeping it running very ambitiously ever since.

**Stenzel:** Mr Vath, Mr Wesch, you and the district of Viersen are pioneers in the field of municipal energy management. What was the incentive for the certification of the energy management system in the district of Viersen? Who initiated the first step?

**Vath:** We started setting up a municipal energy management system in 2014. Based on Mr Wesch's experience and my own bachelor's thesis, we orientated ourselves towards ISO 50001 right from the start. And the certification has created an obligation to continuously review and improve the system and processes. In addition, our administrative management (or the district administrator) supports the establishment and further development of energy management. Among other things, this helps with the planning and budgeting of measures.

**Stenzel:** So you already have the political tailwind for your next energy-saving measures. But what was it like at the beginning? Why did you decide to systematise your energy data and consumption? Did you already have a comprehensive collection of energy data or was the decision rather ambitious at the time?

**Vath:** The decision to systematise energy data is essential for long-term energy management. Initially, there was only isolated data from plans or records. The majority of the data, particularly on the main consumers, was gradually recorded and calculated.



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Today, this data is an indispensable basis for planning measures and further developing automatic energy data collection.

**Stenzel:** The new revision of ISO 50001:2018 requires a stakeholder analysis. You had already ambitiously started to involve the public in the climate protection plan and energy management long before this. How has the response been so far?

**Vath:** The district of Viersen has **had a climate protection concept since 2013**, which also includes several energy management measures. The public is continuously informed about improvements and campaigns in the area of sustainability and energy. Every year, we also present the energy report and target achievement to local political decision-makers at district level.

**Wesch:** We have now reached the point where the political levels are giving us a tailwind. The further development of the energy management system has had obvious effects, not least in monetary terms. The political levels also like this, so we are receiving extensive support from our district administrator.

**Stenzel:** I think this support and backing from politicians is a key success factor for the functioning of the energy management system for organisations in the public sector. ISO 50001 has already proven many times in the past that it is the ideal instrument for greater energy efficiency and therefore also for climate protection improvements. Germany is the world champion in a country comparison of EnMS in accordance with ISO 50001 with more than 8,300 of the almost 22,900 certificates issued<sup>1</sup>. However, the majority of these are held by the manufacturing industry - municipal companies are less well represented. Why are your colleagues in the municipalities so reluctant to introduce an EnMS?

**Vath:** Many local authorities have set up an energy management system, but have not thought in terms of certification or ISO 50001. It seems that every local authority has set up its own structures. Many local authorities are probably put off by the very concept of standards and certification. Management systems are complex, but local authorities in particular have no specific timeframe for setting them up and can establish a system without pressure. It took us two years from the decision to introduce the system to certification. It is important to have the support of an external consultant who has already gained experience with ISO 50001 and can accompany the process.

**Wesch:** It often fails due to the lack of a "doer" who goes their own way, faces up to the often tough political process, remains committed and shows perseverance. However, support from the district administrator is also a key factor.

**Stenzel:** What was the deciding factor for you that made the development and certification of the system work after all?

**Vath:** That was the decision to seek certification and the scheduling of the audit. This gave us the obligation to finalise an ISO 50001-compliant EnMS by March 2017.

**Stenzel:** And that's exactly what happened: our auditor visited you at the end of March 2017. As a certification company, our aim is not only to recognise whether the requirements of the EnMS are being implemented, but also to provide suggestions for improvement in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. How did you perceive our auditor in this role and how do you feel about the certification?

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<sup>1</sup> See ISO Survey 2017



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**Vath:** Your auditor was able to make a number of suggestions for improvement during the certification and review audit, which subsequently contributed significantly to improving the system. Among other things, we have streamlined the documents and can formulate objectives better.

**Stenzel:** The new municipal guideline came into force at the beginning of the year, which enables municipalities and municipally-owned companies to receive funding for the initial certification of the energy or environmental management system, among other things. Unfortunately, you can no longer benefit from this part of the subsidy. Looking back, how do you rate the funding focus for the introduction of a municipal energy management system? Are the eligible material and personnel expenses comprehensive and reasonable and would they have helped you significantly to introduce the EnMS?"

**Vath:** This new funding priority is a very important building block in helping and motivating local authorities to implement structured energy management. Personally, I have missed this funding priority in recent years, as funding and personnel resources are very limited at municipal level. As a result, many stakeholders are reluctant to introduce an EnMS. The eligible expenditure addresses precisely these obstacles. Important foundations can be laid with just a few workshops organised by an external consultancy. Financial support from the federal government naturally helps every local authority. In the district of Viersen, however, we have been able to implement the EnMS without major support and with full conviction. The important thing now is to publicise and promote the content of this funding priority to local authorities throughout Germany.

**Stenzel** Would you take the step towards systematic energy management again with the knowledge you have gained over the last two years? What has the certification brought you on balance (also in monetary terms)?

**Vath:** Yes, we would do that. This is because systematic energy management in accordance with ISO 50001 can also be compared with other certified organisations and enables knowledge transfer. The knowledge is also systematically bundled for our own organisation and gives other people a good introduction. The certification has driven forward strategic and operational planning so that further significant efficiency improvements have been achieved. Thanks to the detailed energy data, we can now better quantify savings. Around € 170,000 in energy costs were saved in 2017. A large part of this was achieved through the systematic EnMS.

**Wesch:** At the moment, it looks as if we will not only be able to meet our targets, but even exceed them. We started with energy costs of around € 1.3 million. In 2018, we fell below one million for the first time. For a municipality like ours, €300,000 is also a good basis for arguing in favour of the EnMS before political decision-making bodies.

**Stenzel:** This saving is an impressive figure that could also encourage others to set up systematic energy management. Apart from this cost argument, what message or tip would you give to other local authorities who want to take a closer look at their energy management?

**Vath:** Energy management should be organised and operated in a structured manner. Recording energy data is time-consuming, but very helpful for the ongoing planning of measures. In addition, certification brings obligations, but also improvement and further development.

## Contact in the district of Viersen

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