



Best Practice Guide

Implementing an Environmental Management System

An Environmental Management System (EMS) is a set of processes and practices that enable an organization to reduce its environmental impacts and increase its operating efficiency. The EMS provides a framework that helps a company achieve its environmental goals through consistent control of its operations. The EMS itself does not dictate a level of environmental performance that must be achieved; each company's EMS is tailored to the company's business and goals.

What is an Environmental Management System (EMS)?

An EMS is a continuous improvement process with the following basic elements:

- Reviewing the company's environmental goals
- Analyzing its environmental impacts and legal requirements
- Setting environmental objectives and targets to reduce legal requirements
- Establishing programs to meet these objectives and targets
- Monitoring and measuring progress in achieving the objectives
- Ensuring employees' environmental awareness and competence
- Reviewing the progress of the EMS and making improvements

Why Implement an EMS?

An EMS can provide many benefits from both an environmental and a business standpoint. Because the EMS is tailored to each company's specific goals and processes, it provides a structure for optimizing company performance across multiple dimensions. Specifically, an EMS can help achieve the following:

- Cost savings through reduced resource consumption
- Increased operational efficiency
- Improved environmental performance
- Compliance with legal and regulatory requirements
- Deeper customer trust
- Enhanced employee skills and satisfaction
- Positive community and public relations

For Small Business Owners

Writing and implementing an EMS does not necessarily need to be a long, elaborate process. Many small businesses can make do with something simpler – even a one- or two-page fact sheet produced internally. While keeping it simple, ensure the following:

- Ensure senior management is involved and consults employees
- Informal communication is cheaper, and often times more efficient in a small organization
- Once formulated, display it somewhere all employees have access to
- Employee buy-in can be used to ensure monitoring and effective implementation

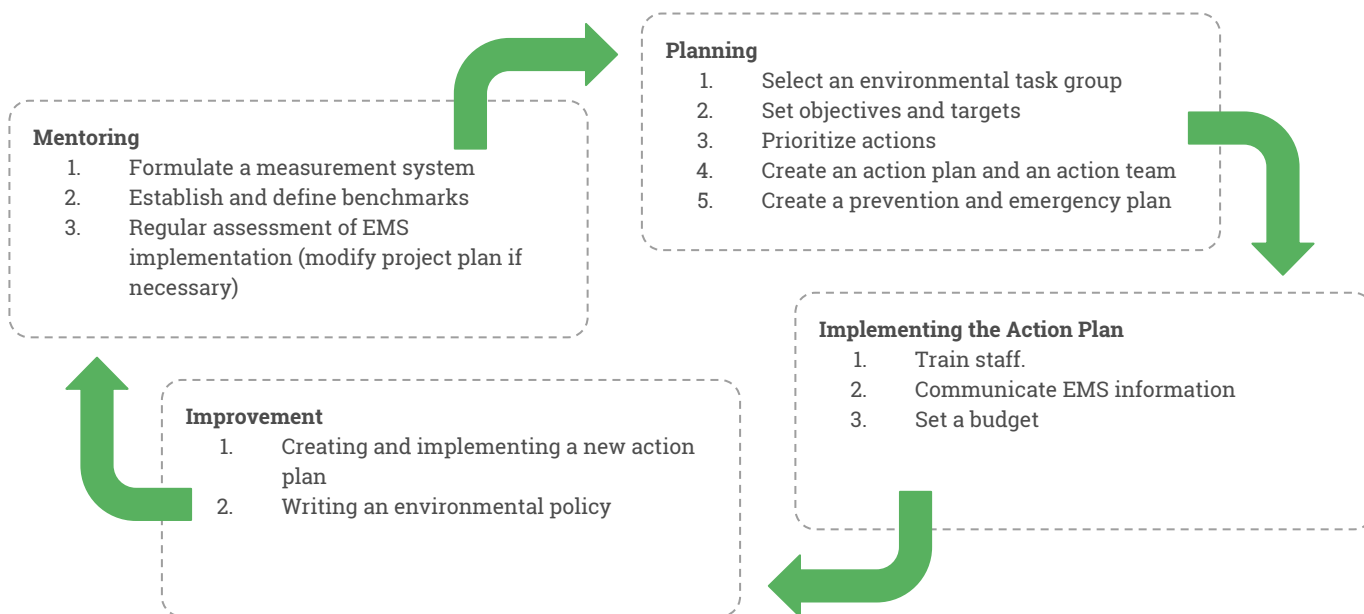
Launching an EMS

Much of what a company needs for an EMS may already be in place. The EMS framework includes many elements that are common to managing many organizational processes, such as quality, health and safety, finance or human resources. Many organizations have some EMS processes in place already, though they may have been designed for other purposes. Integrating environmental management with other key processes can improve performance across multiple functional areas.

Environmental Policy

Before beginning to build an EMS, a company should make sure to define its environmental policy and goals, and communicate these with the entire organization. Launching an EMS requires commitment from both senior managers and employees at all levels. It is important that everyone understands why the organization needs an effective EMS, what their role is and how an EMS will help control environmental impacts in a cost-effective manner. Solidifying these objectives into a policy document gives companies a framework for measuring progress and signals a clear commitment to environmental management.

Environmental management systems follow a systematic approach of planning, implementing, evaluating and improving. The following diagram outlines the basic steps of the process.



Audit and Assessment

Audits can be used both to measure baseline environmental processes in order to shape targets and as a way of regularly reviewing progress toward those goals. External audits provide a rigorous evaluation of a company's environmental practices and are typically conducted annually or every 18 months. Internal reviews between audits help ensure that a company meets its stated environmental performance goals and gives the opportunity to make adjustments to practices as appropriate.

Setting Targets

A fundamental component of an EMS is a set of precise objectives and targets that the company will seek to meet through the EMS. These targets should be driven by the company's overall environmental goals. The objectives and targets will be the drivers of the EMS and will be constantly refined through the continual improvement process. Setting targets will allow the company to properly allocate resources in order to meet its objectives, which should be periodically assessed as part of its EMS policy.

The chart below lists a sample set of objectives and related quantifiable targets. Once these have been established, the organization is ready to begin allocating resources, training employees and implementing the system.

Objective	Target
Reduce emissions of volatile organic compounds	Reduce emissions by 10 percent in 2020
Reduce energy use	Reduce electricity use by 15 percent in 2020 Reduce natural gas use by 20 percent in 2020

Setting Targets continued:

Objective	Target
Improve compliance with wastewater discharge permit limits	Zero permit limit violations by the end of 2020
Promote environmental activities	Promote environmental activities through letters attached to payment slips
Reduce energy used in manufacturing operations	Achieve 10 percent reduction of energy consumption from to the previous year
Recycle plastic bottles	Recycle plastic, 50 percent of bottles in 2012 and 100 percent of bottles in 2013

ISO 14000

The International Organization for Standards provides the ISO 14000 environmental management standards to assist organizations with the development of environmental management systems. The ISO standards are voluntary for companies seeking to implement an EMS.

The following two ISO standards provide requirements and guidelines, respectively, for companies developing an EMS. For further information on the standards, please see [here](#).

ISO 14001 gives the generic requirements for an environmental management system. This has the effect of establishing a common reference for communicating about environmental management between organizations and their customers, regulators, the public and other stakeholders. The standard can be implemented by a wide variety of organizations, whatever their current level of environmental maturity.

ISO 14004 provides guidelines on the elements of an environmental management system and its implementation, and discusses principal issues involved.

Companies can choose to receive certification for their accordance with ISO 14001 requirements. Such companies must also demonstrate a commitment to compliance with applicable environmental legislation, along with a commitment to continual improvement.

Endnotes:

- 1 <http://www.iso.org/iso/iso14000>
- 2 <https://www.epa.gov/ems>



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