

Facilities Management from A to Z

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E nvironmental management systems

An Environmental Management System (EMS) is the term used to describe the policies, processes, measures and controls used by an organisation to manage their impact on the environment. These are distinct from those used to manage quality or safety which are usually captured in separate management systems although some organisations capture all of these things and more in a single integrated Business Management System.

A well crafted EMS should be the enabling force behind the organisations environmental performance, driving and facilitating change as well as tracking progress and improvement. In these environmentally aware times many organisations feel that they need to have an EMS in order to demonstrate their "green" credentials to customers or other stakeholders. Many organisations take the additional but optional step of having their EMS externally certified through ISO 14001, BS 8555, Green Dragon or the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) because of the credibility this lends to their ethical sales and marketing message.

The process of setting up an EMS starts with a baseline assessment of where the organisation currently stands in terms of its impact on the environment and the controls put in place to manage them. Every organisation is different but all have some effect on the environment to a greater or lesser degree. This assessment should also identify the relevant legislation, regulation or other code applicable to the organisation, and the level of compliance achieved.

This baseline and compliance data enables the creation of an Environmental Policy Statement with associated targets and objectives. The Policy should clearly state the aims and principles of the organisation with respect to its impact on the environment, and allow the management to communicate their objectives to employees and other interested parties, including shareholders, customers and suppliers. Such a Policy normally includes a commitment to continual improvement of environmental performance, an outline of the legislation that must be complied with, the role of the employees, and how the policy will be implemented, managed and reviewed.

One of the most important aspects of an EMS should be a declaration of short term targets and longer term objectives and how they will be measured and reported upon. These can be of enormous assistance in motivating employee participation and in demonstrating the effectiveness of the EMS. They should be incorporated into the policy, with straightforward targets (such as reducing carbon dioxide emissions by a set percentage each year), key performance indicators (for example, cost reductions achieved) and benchmarks (such as resource efficiency against suitable peer groups).

For more information on the various certification schemes see:

- ISO 14001: www.bsigroup.co.uk/en/Assessment-and-Certification-services/Management-systems/Standards-and-Schemes/ISO-14001
- EMAS: www.emas.org.uk
- Green Dragon: www.greendragonems.com
- BS8555: www.iema.net/acorn/bs8555