

Top 10 Elements in a Successful Environmental Management System



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

For maximum environmental and economic benefits from an environmental management system and to help comply with the EMS requirement under the Toxics Use & Hazardous Waste Reduction law, a business should include the following 10 elements in its system. These elements can apply to many different EMS models, including ISO 14001. Use this checklist to be sure your system includes all 10 and keep it on site.

1. Environmental Policy

- Reflects how the organization feels about the environment
- Identifies environmental impacts of processes and products
- Ensures compliance with environmental requirements
- Commits organization to prevent pollution, reduce environmental risks and share information with external stakeholders

2. Environmental Requirements and Voluntary Initiatives

- Employees understand their roles in meeting environmental requirements
- Identify management and manufacturing practices that affect the organization's ability to meet requirements
- Identify and work with programs that encourage preventing pollution

3. Objectives/Targets

- Set the following environmental objectives: comply with environmental requirements; continuous improvement in regulated and non-regulated areas; prevent pollution
- Make objectives specific to the organization
- Set timeframes to meet objectives
- Update objectives as environmental requirements evolve

4. Structure, Responsibility and Resources

- Ensure the organization has the personnel and resources needed to meet objectives
- Make managers responsible for the environmental performance of their unit
- Develop procedures for attaining objectives

5. Operational Control

- Establish a procedure to ensure the proper waste management hierarchy is followed
- Develop simple procedures to measure and report environmental impacts of processes and products

6. Corrective and Preventive Action and Emergency Procedures

- Document procedures for identifying, correcting and preventing mistakes
- Develop emergency procedures to minimize or eliminate adverse environmental impacts associated with accidents or emergencies

- Correct causes of potential hazards to prevent pollution

7. Training, Awareness and Competence

- Train staff whose roles affect meeting objectives, and make certain staff are capable of carrying out required duties
- Mandatory trainings include detailed pollution prevention methods

8. Organizational Decision-making and Planning

- Use life-cycle analysis to identify the impact products make on the environment
- Empower all employees to make pollution prevention improvements that do not require significant resources

9. Document Control

- For future evaluation, document steps taken to meet objectives
- Use electronic documentation to improve record management
- Document all pollution prevention suggestions

10. Continuous Evaluation and Improvement

- Conduct and document periodic objective-based audits of the organization's performance
- Use audits to assess pollution prevention efforts

For environmental management system resources, conduct an Internet search for EMS and EMS templates. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has an excellent website to get started.