Environmental Management Systems and Small Businesses

Small Business: Know the FACTS

What is an Environmental Management System?

An Environmental Management System (EMS) is a system developed according to ISO 14001 requirements or a system created with similar intent. ISO 14001 is an internationally recognized standard for the environment. It provides a systems approach patterned after the Deming model of **plan, do, check and act**. ISO 14001 is one of a series of environmental standards developed by the International Organization for Standardization.

ISO 14001 contains specific criteria every EMS must include. In general, an EMS is a set of management processes and procedures allowing an organization to analyze, control, and reduce the environmental impact of its activities, products, and services and operate with greater efficiency and control.

What are the Major Elements of an EMS?

To develop an EMS, a company must:
- ✓ determine the environmental aspects and impacts
- ✓ set objectives and targets
- ✓ implement through management
- ✓ train all employees in their roles
- ✓ document communication procedures
- ✓ document the environmental policy
- ✓ maintain and update all documents
- ✓ establish and maintain emergency response procedures
- ✓ monitor and measure implementation
- ✓ establish procedures for corrective actions
- ✓ maintain all records of documents, procedures, corrective actions, etc.
- ✓ establish periodic management review process

An EMS may address issues such as eco-labeling, environmental auditing, life cycle assessment, environmental performance evaluation, and environmental aspects in product standards. The focus on management "distinguishes these standards from performance" standards. An EMS helps an organization establish and meet its own policy goals through objectives and targets, organizational structures and accountability, review functions, and management controls, all with top management oversight.

EMSs do not set requirements for environmental compliance, nor do these standards establish requirements for specific levels of pollution prevention or performance. Often, however, these elements are a positive outcome of implementing a well planned EMS.

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What is Required of Companies When Developing an EMS?

Companies developing an EMS may or may not seek full certification under ISO 14001. The certification adds credibility, because the system is reviewed by an external third party and found to meet all criteria of ISO 14001.

Many companies that export their products, or supply others that export a final product, are finding that ISO certification has become a necessary component of doing business. For example, suppliers for the large auto makers have been required to obtain ISO 14001 certification to continue their supplier status.

An additional benefit of a small business creating and implementing an EMS is that the process tends to provided valuable direction and assistance on handling all applicable environmental requirements.

EMS Information Resources

⇒ **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**
If you are interested in developing an EMS for your small business, start by visiting the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) web site: https://www.epa.gov/ems.

⇒ **Green Tier**
If you develop an EMS, you may be eligible to apply to the Department of Natural Resources Green Tier program. Green Tier can offer eligible companies some flexibility in DNR issued permits and compliance methods. For more information on Green Tier, visit the web site at https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/GreenTier/.