

Independent Guide

What is an environmental management system?



Independent workplace compliance

Introduction

An Environmental Management System (EMS) is a framework that helps organisations monitor, control, and continuously improve their environmental performance.

An EMS also aims to reduce environmental impacts through a clear policy and structured processes, address compliance requirements and improve overall environmental performance. You can create your own EMS or use the internationally recognised standard for environmental management systems, ISO14001.

An environmental management system should establish, document, implement, maintain and continually improve environmental performance operating within a defined scope, for example, the operation and management of buildings or all organisational activities.

What are the key features of an environmental management system?

There are several key elements within a successful environmental management system including the following:

- An appropriate environmental policy and strategy.
- Identification of aspects and impacts and determination of their significance.
- Legal and other requirements established and reviewed.
- A structure and programme of environmental objectives and targets.
- Clear roles, responsibilities and competency.
- Demonstrate operational control and document procedures.
- Systems for monitoring and measurement.
- Emergency preparedness planned and tested.
- Process to review and continually improve.
- Communication processes.
- Clear documentation and version control.

What is the importance of environmental management system?

A specific and fully adopted environmental management system will improve environmental performance, identify environmental aspects and reduce environmental impacts, minimise the risk of environmental incidents such as spills helping to protect the environment, identify and meet your compliance obligations. The system should also provide the structure needed to continually improve, integrate with other business processes and give your stakeholders confidence in your environmental management and that their expectations are being met.

What are the steps in creating an environmental management system (EMS)?

As with most successful management systems the plan, do, check, act approach is a good framework to use in creating your system. A good starting point is deciding if you wish to have your EMS accredited to the international standard ISO14001, if so the standard must be followed closely in creating your EMS.

The next step would then be understanding the needs and expectations of interested parties, most start with the regulators here and focus on compliance obligations related to legal requirements but often there will be other expectations set by investors, customers and other parties to consider and incorporate. Early milestones are setting your environmental policy and gaining and understanding of the operations to be covered, where your business fits in the broader environment, physically, regarding supply chain, up and downstream processes etc and all of your significant environmental aspects and impacts that require management and inclusion in the system.



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With a clear environmental policy and strategy along with the identification of aspects and impacts with a determination of their significance, your legal and other stakeholder requirements established and understood, you have the information you need for your EMS. You should create operational control and document procedures for your significant aspects as well as develop a structured programme of environmental objectives and targets to reduce your environmental impacts. As part of this, agree clear roles, responsibilities and competency then incorporate this in the management system.

On an ongoing basis there should be systems for monitoring and measurement as well as emergency preparedness which should be planned and regularly tested. You must have robust processes to review and continually improve as well as clear communication processes. The systems should have documentation and version control to protect its integrity.

This guide is of a general nature; specific advice can be obtained from Assurity Consulting.

Assurity Consulting is the UK's leading independent compliance consultancy specialising in workplace health, safety and environmental solutions. We have over 35 years' experience of helping customers of all sizes, from across all sectors, manage their compliance responsibilities, making sure that their organisation is compliant, their employees are safe, their processes are cost effective and their management team is in control.



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