

# Environmental Tools:

## Environmental Management Systems

### **What is an environmental management system?**

The goal of environmental management systems (EMS) is to incorporate environmental considerations into day-to-day business operations to achieve continuous environmental improvement. An EMS involves a continual cycle of planning, implementing, reviewing and improving the processes and actions that an organization undertakes to meet its business and environmental goals.

A company can seek official accreditation for its EMS under different schemes. Accreditation under most EMS reflects a firm's management and record-keeping processes, and not necessarily their actual environmental performance. Certification of the EMS helps to ensure that the company gets the greatest recognition from its efforts.

An EMS can help a business increase awareness of, and its control over, environmental impacts. It is designed to be flexible enough to be applicable to any size of company and to any industry sector.

### **Where are they used?**

#### International Organization for Standardization (ISO 14001 series)

ISO 14001 governs environmental management systems in which organizations set their own goals, based on whatever consideration they wish to include, such as the demands of customers, regulators, communities, lenders, or environmental groups. ISO 14001 provides a framework within which they develop plans to meet those targets and to produce information about whether or not the targets are met.

#### The EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)

EMAS is a government sponsored management tool for companies and other organizations to evaluate, report and improve their environmental performance. In addition, EMAS was strengthened by: the integration of EN/ISO 14001 as the required environmental management system; adopting an attractive EMAS logo to signal EMAS registration to the outside world; and more strongly considering indirect effects such as those related to financial services or administrative and planning decisions. Participation is voluntary and extends to public or private organizations operating in the European Union and the European Economic Area (EEA).

#### Responsible Care

Responsible Care is an international program that has been adopted in the chemical industries of 46 countries. The main aim of Responsible Care is continual improvement in health, safety and environmental performance in the chemical industry.

A mandatory self-assessment questionnaire helps companies to check their progress with

Responsible Care and shows them where improvements could be made. Manufacturing sites are being encouraged to have their management systems verified by an external agency – the certification bodies.

### **Tool Performance:**

#### **Pros**

- Provides an opportunity to evaluate and improve environmental performance.
- May enhance compliance with government regulations.
- May prevent unwarranted pollution and conserve resources.
- May reduce/mitigate a firm's environmental risks.
- Attracts new customers and markets (or at least retains access to customers and markets with EMS requirements).
- Increases efficiency and reduces operating costs.
- Enhances employee morale, as well as the possibility of enhanced recruitment of new employees.
- Enhances image with public, regulators, lenders and, investors.
- Achieves/improves employee awareness of environmental issues and responsibilities.

#### **Cons**

- Certain EMS systems lack public accountability and transparency around standards development, the content of the standards themselves and overall reported results.
- Setting of scope, objectives and targets is at the discretion of the organization.
- Audit focus is on the standard and the organization's EMS and not focused on environmental performance.
- An investment of internal resources, including staff/employee time (Note: Internal labor costs represent the bulk of the EMS resources expended by most organizations).
- Costs for personnel training, associated with hiring consulting, and technical resources to analyze environmental impacts and improvement options, if needed. Associated costs with some EMS programs limit the feasibility of participation from smaller firms.

### **Special Considerations:**

Key requirements for the use of EMS:

- The commitment must include senior management: in some jurisdictions, this has important legal implications.
- Legal and other requirements must be addressed.
- Interested parties' concerns must be reflected in the development of objectives and targets.
- A commitment must be made for continuous improvement.