
Implementation Tips

by Steven G. Rowley, CHMM

Through the various EMS implementation projects that we have completed, we have acquired a great deal of insightful knowledge that we are able to pass on to our clients. The following is a list of basic, yet very important tips that an organization should be familiar with prior to and throughout the EMS implementation process.

❑ **Establish Top Management Commitment**

Without the commitment of the organization's top management, implementing an EMS will be exceptionally difficult if not impossible. Top management's commitment is developed through their understanding basic EMS concepts, the implementation process and the resources that will be needed, and the benefits that an EMS can provide. This can be accomplished by conducting an overview training session with the facility's top management early on, prior to initiating the implementation process and prior to committing any level of resources.

❑ **Define the EMS Structure**

Once the decision to implement an EMS has been made, and pursuant to top management's commitment to the process and the necessary resources, it will be necessary to define EMS-related roles and responsibilities and communicate those to employees as necessary to facilitate implementation of the EMS. Top management will need to appoint a management representative who, irrespective of their other job functions, will have the overall responsibility for the implementation and ongoing maintenance of the EMS. Additional roles and responsibilities may include emergency response team, training coordinator, EMS team, supervisors and EMS auditors, among others.

❑ **Define the Scope of the EMS**

Early on in the implementation process, the organization will need to define to which parts of the organization the EMS will be applicable. Outside consultancy may be necessary to make this determination, as there are a variety of considerations that need to be taken into

account. Although not applicable in all cases, the "fence-line" can serve as the basis for defining the scope of the EMS. It is possible to exclude certain site operations from the scope of the EMS but only if those operations are outside of the control and influence of the organization and/or if there are no environmental aspects that interact with the facility's EMS.

❑ **Develop an Implementation Plan and Schedule**

Pursuant to an initial review of the organization's existing system of environmental management, an implementation plan and schedule will need to be prepared that define implementation tasks and general time frames for their completion. The plan will serve as a "road map" through the implementation process. The schedule needs to be realistic, reflecting the organization's needs and resource availability. Once established, the plan and schedule need to be adhered to and the project made a priority.

❑ **Use a Team Approach**

A system is a combination of many parts that function as a whole to achieve a particular result. Accordingly, the implementation and ongoing maintenance of the system should reflect the efforts of more than one individual. A team should be assembled that comprises the organizations best and brightest. The actual makeup of this team will be very organization-specific; however, typically consists of a cross-section of the various levels of the organization or a cross-functional group representing the various site activities. In all cases, this group is critical to the success of the project.

❑ **Use Outside Resources**

Although the ISO 14001 standard is a mere five pages, there is quite a lot of interpretation necessary in understanding its intent. Accordingly, retaining a consultant or technical expert can save you time and money by ensuring you are addressing the intent of the standard and by sharing proven implementation strategies, and providing much needed assistance for completing implementation tasks. This is a very important project and you therefore need to be sure to select a consultant with experience and the appropriate credentials.

❑ **Interview and Select a Registrar Early**

You want to be sure that you select a registrar that is competent, has experience in your industrial sector, with whom you are comfortable, is cost-effective and who will be able to accommodate your implementation schedule. It is recommended that a registrar be interviewed and selected at the onset of your implementation project to ensure your expectations and schedules are compatible.

❑ **Make the EMS Specific to Your Organization**

There are no “cookie-cutter” approaches to EMS implementation. This is your chance to define a system that works for your organization and which addresses weaknesses in your existing procedures and programs. You can’t accomplish this by buying an EMS off the shelf.

❑ **Take Advantage of Existing Processes and Procedures**

Regardless of how robust your existing system of environmental management may or may not

be, there will be a lot in-place that already addresses the requirements of ISO 14001 and which can be incorporated directly into the EMS. Where possible, it is recommended that an organization take advantage of these existing processes without “recreating the wheel.” This practice will save time in both developing a new process and training the appropriate personnel in its use. It is for this reason that we recommend the completion of a gap analysis to identify these areas where efficiencies can be realized.

❑ **Communicate**

Communication throughout the implementation process is another critical action item. What should get communicated? Environmental aspects information, environmental performance data, the ISO 14000 implementation project itself, EMS roles and responsibilities, the important role that all employees play in the implementation process, and much more. This information should be communicated to persons at all levels and functions of the organization.

❑ **Make the Process Enjoyable**

Too many times we approach projects, especially those that are concepts that we are not familiar with, with disdain. Not to say that implementing an EMS is not challenging and will not be without its moments of frustration; however, this is a unique opportunity to get to know more about your organization and your fellow-employees and the jobs that they do. The implementation process needs to be enjoyable as the EMS will become a new way of doing things and not simply something that will go away once completed.