

A young couple, a woman with dreadlocks and glasses and a man with glasses and a beard, are looking at a smartphone together. They are both smiling. The image is overlaid with a blue geometric pattern of triangles. The text "GETTING STARTED" is written in a bold, dark blue font across the middle of the image.

GETTING STARTED

CHAPTER 1: EMS CONCEPTS

An EMS consists of specific elements to help companies identify and control their environmental impacts and regulatory requirements, set goals to reduce the impacts, and implement systems to document and report on environmental performance. As you review the elements, you will probably realize that your company already has some foundations in place. One value of the EMS approach is that these existing pieces can be incorporated into the EMS.

You do not have to have all of these elements in your EMS. However, most are valuable in helping improve compliance and environmental performance, so carefully consider your company's operations before excluding any elements. The elements are briefly described below and presented in more detail in the guidance.

Organizational Context	Understanding the company business, key stakeholders' interests, and organizational constraints within which the EMS must function.
Environmental Policy	A policy outlining the company's commitment to compliance and reducing environmental impact; provides a framework for planning and action.
Environmental Aspects	The ways that a business's activities, products, or services could potentially impact or do impact the environment. For example, waste generation or air emissions.
Compliance Obligations	Laws, regulations, and other requirements, such as internal policies or voluntary standards, that address environmental management.
Objectives and Planning	Environmental goals to help your organization improve compliance and environmental performance.
Organizational Roles & Responsibilities	Individuals and groups responsible for specific EMS elements, activities, and environmental management.
Competency & Awareness	Identification and tracking of training related to environmental aspects, regulatory requirements, and the EMS.
Communication	Processes for internal and external communications on environmental management issues.
Documents	EMS and related environmental documentation outlining what should be done to maintain the EMS and to manage the documents (e.g., version control, distribution).
Operational Planning & Control	Procedures and tools to implement environmental management.
Emergency Preparedness and Response	Documentation and plans for preventing and responding to emergencies that have the potential to impact the environment.
Monitoring and Measurement	Monitoring strategies and metrics for evaluating key activities and tracking EMS performance, as well as compliance with legal requirements.
Performance Evaluation & Auditing	Periodic verification of EMS operation and performance.
Management Review	Periodic review of the EMS by top management.
Continual Improvement	Process to evaluate compliance, correct problems, and prevent recurrence.

EMS CONCEPTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

PLAN - DO - CHECK - ACT

The ISO EMS approach follows the Plan – Do – Check – Act management cycle of continuous improvement. This approach has been used in quality management for many years and is a systematic way to implement processes and improve performance. The steps are:

Plan – Identify issues and decide what needs to be done. In an EMS, this means understanding environmental and regulatory issues and setting goals for the organization's performance.

Do – This step involves developing the structure for implementing solutions (for example, defining responsibilities and specific tasks) and implementing processes. In some cases, this step is viewed as an opportunity to test a solution before fully implementing it. For example, an organization may initially select one store to test a zero waste approach, rather than trying to implement this goal across all of their stores at once.

Check – This is a critical component of any quality system – gathering data and information on performance and communicating the results. If a store sets a goal to be 100 percent in compliance with hazardous waste regulations, then employees need a way to measure the results or they will not know if they have succeeded (and might be unpleasantly surprised in a regulatory inspection).

Act – In the Act phase, an organization uses the information and experience from Check to go back to the Plan step and make adjustments to ensure that their goals will be achieved or to set new goals. The Act phase may also be the process of expanding a successful project. In the landfill-free example above, the process used is that the first store could be improved based on the initial experience and then implemented more widely. By evaluating goals and updating them as milestones are achieved or situations change, the organization's performance improves over time and is responsive to outside influences.



ROLE OF HEALTH & SAFETY IN EMS

Environmental concerns and requirements in Health and Safety (H&S) programs may be similar or overlap and some requirements may be addressed concurrently. Some companies find that integrating H&S and EMS efforts can improve compliance and/or save money. In developing your EMS, actively consider how the EMS might complement your H&S programs, and at a minimum, refer to relevant H&S programs in your EMS.

To improve environmental management, your organization needs to focus not only on what happened, but also on how and why it happened. Over time, the identification and correction of systematic deficiencies leads to better environmental and overall organizational performance.

ISO CERTIFICATION

Organizations following the ISO 14001 standard can choose to have their EMS ISO-certified based on third-party audits. Certification can increase confidence in a company's ability to manage environmental compliance and potential risks. However, certification adds additional steps and costs to developing and maintaining an EMS and many retailers do not see a need for or significant benefit from certification. Retailers that might benefit from certification include those whose primary branding relies heavily on an environmental reputation or those recovering from a negative environmental event.

CHAPTER 2: GETTING STARTED

This chapter presents common-sense steps to help lay the groundwork for successful EMS implementation. While the exact steps you follow will depend on the status of your current environmental management activities and processes, reviewing these steps can help you develop your internal plan for moving forward. Key steps for getting started with your EMS implementation are below.

KEY STEPS

DEFINE THE ORGANIZATION'S GOALS FOR THE EMS.

A first step in EMS planning is to define why you are developing an EMS. Are you trying to improve environmental performance (for example, reducing risk associated with regulatory non-compliance or increasing pollution prevention)? Are you trying to promote involvement throughout the organization? Write down your goals and refer to them regularly as you move forward. As you design and implement the EMS, always ask: How is this task going to help us achieve our goals for the EMS?

This also is a good time to start considering the scope of the EMS to explicitly define what the EMS will cover. The scope of the EMS has a major bearing on the time and cost of implementation, as well as the effectiveness of the EMS in reducing environmental impacts. Chapter 3 covers the EMS scope.

OBTAIN TOP MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT.

One of the most critical steps in the planning process is gaining the commitment of top management for EMS development and implementation. Management needs to understand the benefits of an EMS and what it will take to implement the EMS. Explain the strengths and limitations of the organization's current approach to environmental management and how those limitations can affect environmental, financial, and business performance. Then, explain how an EMS can help address these limitations. Management also has a role in ensuring that the goals for the EMS are clear and consistent with other organizational goals. Management's commitment should be communicated across the organization.

SELECT EMS LEADERSHIP.

This step involves identifying the EMS champions who will be responsible for implementation. Larger organizations will usually have two levels of EMS leadership, while small organizations may have a single person.

The EMS Manager should be from the organization's high-level management and will be responsible for the EMS (i.e. making sure that all tasks relating to the EMS are identified and completed). The EMS Manager is also responsible for reporting to senior management on the progress of the EMS. The second staff person is the EMS Coordinator, who is responsible for working closely with the EMS Manager and the EMS Team (see below) to identify, assign, schedule, support, and ensure completion of all EMS-related tasks. It is important for this person to have the time to commit to the EMS-building process. In a smaller organization, the EMS Manager and the EMS Coordinator may be the same person.

BUILD AN IMPLEMENTATION TEAM.

An EMS Team with representatives from key functions (e.g. engineering, finance, human resources, and service) can identify and assess issues, opportunities, and existing processes. Consider including contractors, suppliers, or other external parties as part of the EMS Team, where appropriate. The EMS Team should meet regularly, especially in the early stages of your EMS efforts. An EMS Team can help ensure that EMS procedures are practical and effective and members can build commitment to and ownership of the EMS among other employees.

HOLD A KICK-OFF MEETING.

Once the EMS Manager has organized the EMS Team, hold a kick-off meeting to discuss the organization's goals in implementing an EMS, the initial steps, and the roles of team members, among other topics. If possible, get top management to participate in the meeting and describe its commitment to the EMS. The kick-off meeting is also a good opportunity to provide EMS training for EMS Team members. Follow this meeting with a communication to employees throughout the organization about the EMS process and goals, what you may need from them in the future, and how they can get involved.

CONDUCT A GAP ANALYSIS.

An important component of laying the groundwork for an EMS is conducting an initial review or "gap analysis" to evaluate your current processes and specific needs. In this step, the EMS Team compares the current compliance and other environmental programs/systems to the criteria for your EMS (such as ISO 14001). Evaluate your organization's structure, procedures, policies, environmental impacts, training programs, and other factors. If you have a current EMS, determine which parts are in good shape and which need additional work.

The gap analysis can be counterproductive if you only focus on what is missing. In practice, a gap analysis should identify both the strengths and weaknesses of existing programs. In this way, you can recognize what your organization is already doing well and evaluate ways to build on existing programs and activities.

Some organizations may find that they already perform many of the activities related to an EMS and do not need to develop many elements from scratch.

Looking outside the environmental arena can also provide inspiration. For example, a quality management system may not be strictly environmental, but it may help with your EMS. If a process you already have in place helps you manage important facility activities, it can probably help in environmental management as well.

A gap analysis is designed to answer the following questions:

- How well are the organization's environmental programs performing?
- Has the organization defined the environmental goals it hopes to achieve?
- What are the gaps between existing programs and the elements and criteria for an EMS?
- What existing programs, processes, and activities can serve as the best foundation for improved environmental performance?

Based on the results of the gap analysis, prepare an implementation plan with a budget and schedule. The plan should identify what key actions are needed, who will be responsible, what resources are needed, and when actions will be completed. Think about how you will maintain focus and momentum over time. Before developing your implementation plan, it is useful to review the modules in the second section of this guidance to understand the full extent of what will be needed.

SECURE RESOURCES AND ASSISTANCE.

The implementation plan and budget should be reviewed and approved by top management, with a commitment from them to provide the necessary resources. If necessary, revise the implementation plan to fit the resources that you will have, otherwise success may be elusive.

ENGAGE EMPLOYEES.

Employees are a great source of knowledge on environmental issues related to their work areas, as well as on the effectiveness of current processes and procedures. They can also help the EMS team in drafting procedures. By involving employees in the EMS development process, you can create a greater feeling of organization-wide EMS ownership and commitment. Ways to involve employees include having the EMS Team members seek input and feedback from employees in their functional groups, conducting surveys, conducting focus groups, and informally interviewing key employees during facility visits.

MONITOR AND COMMUNICATE PROGRESS.

As you build the EMS, be sure to regularly monitor your progress against your implementation plan and communicate progress throughout the organization. Be sure to communicate accomplishments and describe next steps. Build on small successes to get employees excited about the EMS. Also, be sure to keep top management informed and engaged, especially if additional resources might be required.

PREPARE AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN WITH A BUDGET AND SCHEDULE.

NEXT

Now that you know the key elements of approaching EMS implementation, you can conduct a gap analysis to evaluate the current status of your facility. Before starting the gap analysis, you should read the other chapters to better understand the most common elements in an EMS. You will also need to track your implementation efforts and your progress in developing the specific EMS elements.