

Critical success factors for environmental management systems

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Public concern about environmental degradation from human activities is putting increasing pressure on businesses around the world to reduce or eliminate the environmental impacts of their operations. To improve environmental performance, organizations should implement effective environmental management systems (EMSs) that allow them to better control the environmental impacts of their operations.

ISO 14001, the recognized International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standard, was released in 1996 (and revised in 2004) to establish basic EMS requirements. ISO 14001 is voluntary and gives businesses an internationally recognized and accepted framework for implementing and maintaining a system for environmental management. The standard contains no environmental performance requirements; these are identified and determined by the business, depending on the location of its operations, specific requirements and stated objectives for local and corporate entities.

ISO 14001:2004 provides a baseline

EMS to enhance an organization's environmental performance through a proactive system that promotes continuous improvement and pollution prevention. Additionally, some organizations benefit financially from an effectively implemented EMS by using it as a mechanism to reduce costs related to environmental issues and to identify opportunities for improving financial performance.

There are several critical success factors to address when developing and implementing an EMS:

- **Total commitment.** Implementing ISO 14001 must be pervasive throughout the organization and extend to its suppliers, contractors, etc. Total, unilateral commitment, ownership and acceptance of the EMS are required for it to function effectively. This is not as hard as it may seem, and an organization's management is usually pleasantly surprised when employee buy-in and enthusiasm exceeds their own.

- **Create an environmental culture.** Through implementation of ISO 14001, an organization can create opportunities to improve environmental performance. However, it must be made clear that the EMS is not an environmental program

developed, implemented and managed by only a few of the organization's environmental department personnel. EMS implementation creates an opportunity for the organization to undergo an overall cultural shift toward environmental awareness. Employee awareness will foster understanding of how an employee's own activities can affect the environment. By instilling an environmentally conscious culture into the organization, the EMS becomes a means to improve environmental performance. It requires that environmental issues be given the same consideration as more traditional management elements such as finance, operations and engineering.

- **Better procedures, training and corrective action.** The EMS provides improved environmental and economic performance through proactive operating procedures and training that cover all aspects of operations that could have environmental impacts. The EMS also creates heightened awareness of potential environmental problems resulting from routine activities. Because the EMS will become an integral part of the organization, adequate time should be given to its planning, review and potential environmen-

tal consequences, including ways to minimize impacts. Additionally, the EMS corrective action system requires organizations to take a "causal" approach to system and operating nonconformities.

You must also be aware of myths associated with establishing an EMS in order to build your system on fact not fantasy. Example myths include: "You must be in compliance with regulations at all times"; "ISO 14001 prescribes what your environmental practice must be"; "EMS performance data must be shared with external parties"; and "Internal audits are the same as compliance audits."

When developing and maintaining your EMS, use measurable system indicators to help you determine whether your system is working effectively and efficiently.

Seek advice from your consultant, training organization or registrar and solicit their experience, advice and interpretations. Incorporating such expert knowledge will contribute significantly to the success of your EMS.

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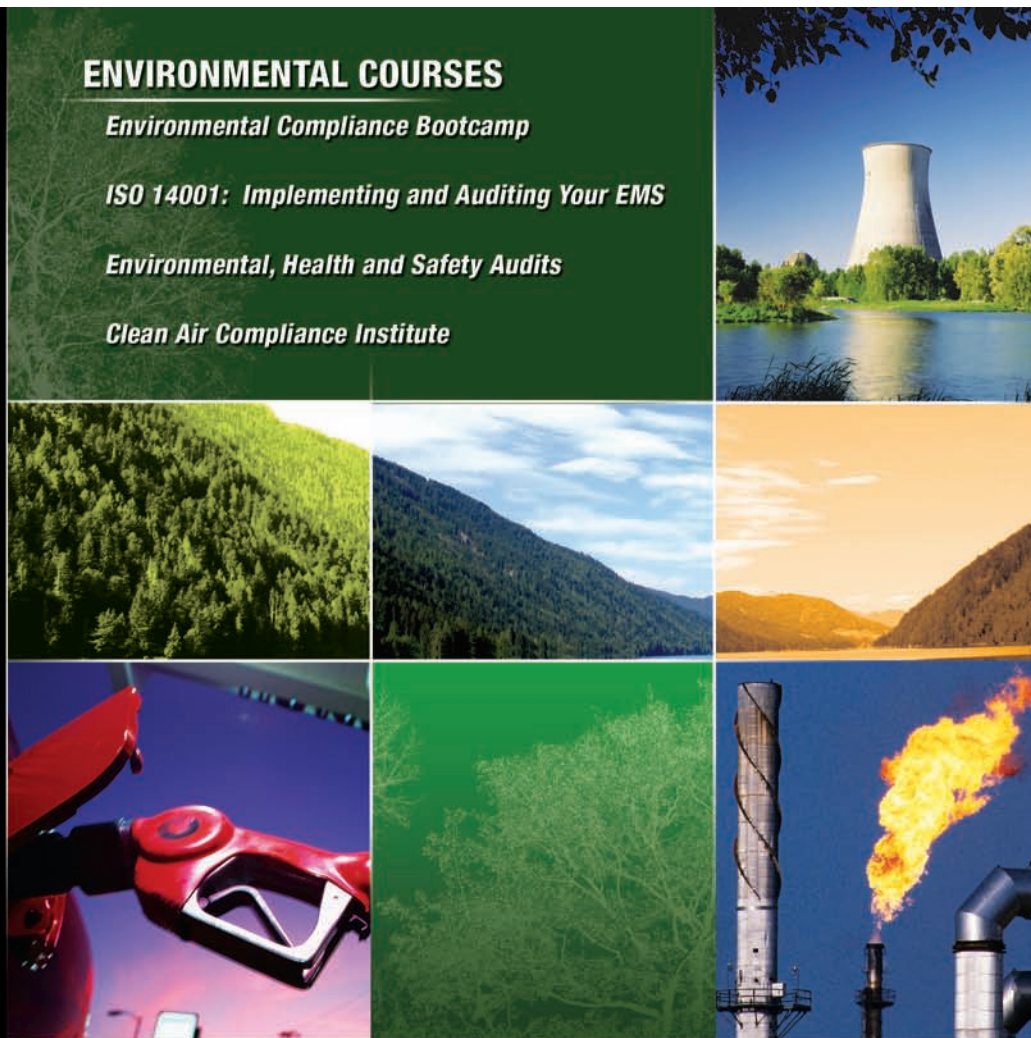
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