



Environmental Management Systems Do Improve Performance and Can Lower Costs

Over the past 15 years, I've been involved in the development and implementation of a variety of Environmental Management Systems (EMS) in a wide selection of settings including heavy industry and light industry, from corporate cultures to the shop floor. In all there a number of "drivers" that tend to set direction, commitment, and success. Yet, those organizations that take EMS seriously realize tangible performance improvements and reduced overall operating costs.

EMS initiatives can be prompted by a desire for recognition, requirement for certification in the marketplace, compliance orders, or just identifying and acting on best management practices. In any case, where there is strong commitment from management and labor, clear communication of objectives and targets, and a mechanism for continual improvement, EMS tend to have lasting power because they work. They work because good people have identified and created real results.

The ISO 14001 International Standard for EMS, the EPA National Environmental Performance Track (NEPT) Guidelines and several other leading "schemes" provide proven approaches towards organizing your workforce, understanding needs and requirements and providing a roadmap for success. Sometimes, you can achieve success by blending elements from these various schemes. You should research several before getting underway with any single approach. See what's proven successful in your industry or organizational setting first.

Based on the experiences of many organizations globally, the following table summarizes some of the real performance improvements and cost reductions your organization can achieve through implementing an effective EMS:

EMS Component	Description of Task	Performance Improvements	Cost Reductions
Environmental Policy	Develop a statement of your organization's commitment to the environment.	Environmental and operational activities are clearly understood and optimally performed.	Clear policy can prevent recurrence of non-conformance reducing operating costs.
Environmental Aspects	Identify attributes of your products, activities and services and their significant impacts on the environment.	Identify clear indicators to measure performance and identify priorities for positive impact.	Identify opportunities to reduce costs such as energy, rejects, and operating costs.
Legal Requirements	Identify and ensure access and understanding of relevant rules and regulations.	Ensure performance in accordance with regulatory and permit requirements.	Control, reduce, and eliminate out-of-compliance costs.
Objectives and Targets	Establish goals for your organization and your EMS.	Identify clear indicators to measure performance and identify priorities for positive impact.	Identify opportunities to reduce costs such as energy, rejects, and operating costs.
Environmental Management Program	Plan actions necessary to achieve objectives and targets.	Plot a course for success in performance.	Identify opportunities to reduce costs such as energy, rejects, and operating costs.
Structure and Responsibilities	Establish roles and responsibilities for environmental management.	Identify clear roles and re-engineer organization for optimal use of resources.	Optimizing organizational responsibilities can reduce manpower costs.
Training and Awareness	Ensure employees are trained and capable of carrying out environmental responsibilities.	Optimize environmental performance through clear direction.	Optimize training requirements and delivery for reduced awareness costs.
Communications	Establish process for internal and external communications on environmental management issues.	Ensure that all responsible parties are clearly communicated to.	Reduce communications costs and errors by executing a clear communications plan.
Document Control	Ensure effective management of procedures and other important documents.	Optimize environmental performance through clear and current instruction.	Avoid acting upon "old" instructions and achieve as presently required.

Operational Control	Identify, plan and manage operations and activities.	Optimize environmental performance through clear direction.	Ensure activities are conducted properly without rework reducing labor and material costs.
Emergency Preparedness and Response	Identify potential emergencies and risks and measures to prevent them.	Minimize risk exposure and mitigate releases.	Reduce liability costs from releases.
Monitoring and Measurement	Track performance on achieving activities and goals.	Ensure accurate measurement of performance.	Accurately understand performance and associated costs/benefits.
Non-Conformance & Corrective Action	Identify and correct problems and prevent recurrence.	Accurately assess non-conformance and prevent recurrence.	Reduce or eliminate costs to operate by preventing or mitigating non-conformance costs.
Records	Maintain and manage records of EMS performance	Ensure accurate measurement of performance.	Accurately understand performance and associated costs/benefits.
Auditing	Periodically verify that the EMS is operating as intended.	Clearly understand and achieve compliance and performance by verification.	Identify non-conformance issues early and reduce cost to correct.
Management Review	Periodically review EMS for continual improvement.	Optimal performance over time and in response to organizational and operational changes.	Control regulatory and operational costs and identify areas for improvement.

For more information on evaluating approaches or getting started with an EMS for your organization, give [Bill Barnes](#) a call for a free consultation or more information on EMS.