# HOW TO UP THE EMS ANTE

**Implement these tips and your ISO 14001 environmental management system will be more effective and more robust. By Laura Burden.**


ISO 14001 environmental management systems (EMS) are ideal for organisations wanting to improve their environmental performance, increase demand for products and services, reduce costs, achieve legal compliance and promote a positive image.

Currently in Australia, more than 1,500 organisations have an EMS certified to ISO 14001 – get them right and they will start delivering benefits that many established EMSs still haven't achieved. So here are a few tips based on real world experience to help your organisation develop a more effective EMS that meets the requirements of the ISO 14001 standard.

**1. Management must commit**

The first step in the adoption of ISO 14001 is that senior management needs to be committed and involved with the development, implementation and maintenance of the EMS. If management thinks the system can be managed by the EMS coordinator alone, it stands a good chance of being ineffective.

Managers unfamiliar with ISO 14001 should be trained in the requirements of the standard and understand its benefits. They should be involved from its inception and kept up-to-date with its progress.

If your EMS development project doesn't have management commitment, then put it on hold as there is a real chance it won't be finished, or at a minimum won't be implemented effectively. Either way, you'll be asking for colleagues to be disillusioned and disinterested.

With established systems, managers need to take a lead with the management review requirements and have sufficient competence to understand their organisation's significant environmental aspects, as well as legal and other requirements.

When existing systems need more commitment, try reviewing your training requirements and encourage greater management participation by increasing the frequency of management review meetings and discussions within the workplace, both directly and indirectly.

**2. Plan your EMS**

Systems can often be more complicated than needed. If they are confusing and difficult to manage, the links between the standard and how the organisation demonstrates its compliance can be hazy.

To prevent this, organisations should identify whether they have the internal skills and resources to develop an ISO 14001 EMS or should outsource its development. If you decide to outsource, obtain several proposals and ensure the consultant you engage has EMS experience and qualifications. Engaging the wrong one can be a costly mistake.

A few practical pointers. Make sure you have clearly linked the system and its document with the elements of the standard and consider integrating the system as much as possible with existing procedures and mechanisms.

Second, remember that the system doesn't have to be perfect but it needs to work for you. Any problems can generally be ironed-out during the reviewing stages after implementation.

Finally, when developing the overarching environmental policy, avoid buzzwords such as 'sustainable' and 'ecological' unless there is a clear understanding of their meaning within the policy or the EMS.

**3. Simplify the aspects registers**

The key to any EMS is getting the aspects right. Environmental aspects are any element of an organisation's activities, products or services that can interact with the environment.

Aspects registers don't have to reflect every single step in a process, as long as they detail what can interact with the environment. I've often noticed providing too much detail over-complicates the system, which adds difficulty in identifying significant aspects, creates a reviewing nightmare and loses the interest of those being trained.

It's also good practice to include inherent and residual risks to understand the importance of your controls and demonstrate commitment to the prevention of pollution. It also makes it easier to target inspections, audits, training and improvement programs.

Check that you've covered everything in your scope and that your defined scope is accurate. There's nothing worse than having to rework your aspects register and EMS documents because you've forgotten to include something. One way to prevent this from occurring is to include as many people as possible during the development of the scope and aspect register.

Also, if you have both corporate and site facilities, you should consider developing a corporate risk profile and use, but not duplicate, site risks.

**4. Evaluate legal requirements**

It's far from unusual for organisations to think they are compliant and yet not have a full understanding of their

compliance requirements.

Some only identify the names of key legislation; others may have subscribed to external service providers who either do not address all compliance requirements or supply too much information, overwhelming the client.

To make the most of the ISO standard, cross-reference your specific legal requirements against your environmental aspects – a simple link in your aspects register will suffice. Ensure this review is tailored to your environmental aspects. Evaluating compliance will be a lot more effective if this is achieved.

When evaluating legal compliance, consider the best method for your organisation, including development of a site inspection checklist, management reporting and auditing. Don't forget that those responsible for its evaluation should have both training and experience.

### 5. Provide adequate resources

If you haven't already developed your EMS, take the time to plan.

Identify the required human, financial and physical resources, including allocating ongoing resources for training, running programs, EMS coordination and more.

Ensure all key responsibilities are assigned and agreed to prior to its development. Otherwise, as one large organisation I worked with found out, there wasn't anyone available to run the system. In this instance, the people coordinating the EMS development should have spent more time planning the project as they didn't have the authority to delegate responsibility or have the full backing of senior management.

Also, consider developing a simple spreadsheet action plan to help with planning requirements, timing, responsibilities and resources. It's great for demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement and the prevention of pollution, as well as reminding your employees when activities need to be completed.

Make sure people involved with maintaining the system have adequate time to do so and that it is integrated into their routines – and then check that it is being followed.

### 6. Set relevant, measurable objectives and targets

Objectives and targets should be relevant to an organisation's environmental aspects, legal requirements, commitment to prevent pollution and its environmental policy. They should provide a challenge and facilitate continuous improvement.

Setting measurable targets will make it clear when objectives are achieved. It also makes performance monitoring easier and means reporting to management can be presented in figure and graph format.

Where appropriate, consider representing targets in monetary figures too. For example, it can be as simple as 'Reducing waste sent to landfill by X tonnes, which equals a saving of Y dollars'. This will help secure the backing of management generally and specific assistance when rolling out management programs.

### 7. Continuously improve your EMS

Most systems could do with some general improvement. Don't be put off by poor performance but work according to the philosophy of continuous improvement and the prevention of pollution. If the system isn't working effectively, look at steps to fix it and make it work for you.

It's not unusual for an EMS to be redeveloped after a few years. Like any new system, obtain commitment at the planning phase. If you are integrating the EMS with safety or quality systems, ensure the skills and commitment are there or all your good intentions (and time) will be wasted.

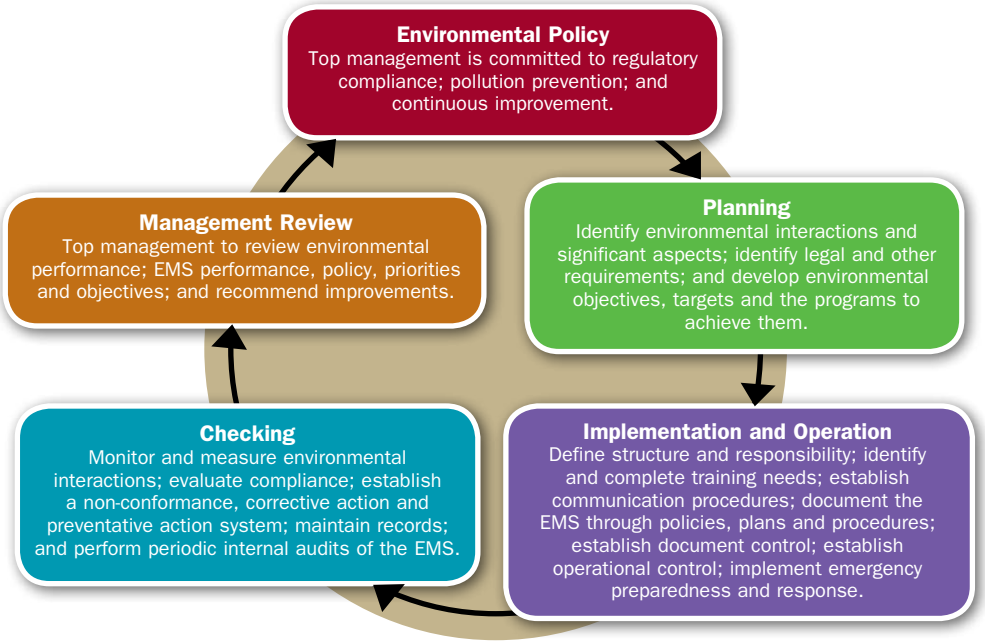
Audits, including internal, are great tools for improving your system. Listen to your certification auditor and apply their findings. If your auditor isn't value adding, then you should consider asking for a more experienced auditor or investigate different auditing companies.

### 8. Recognise the marketing benefits

Finally, many organisations haven't looked at the marketing potential from ISO 14001. They have gone to the trouble of certifying their system and yet haven't even adopted the ISO 14001 logo of their certifying auditors.

By adopting the logo on business cards, marketing material and your website, you will be advertising the organisation as environmentally conscious. By promoting your EMS and environmental policy within tender documents and online, you'll help the organisation's image and perhaps play a part in winning new business.

Laura Burden is an independent environmental consultant and contract ISO 14001 auditor.
www.environmentalmanagementsystem.com.au




Plan–Do–Check–Act: the four stages to any EMS.

**FACT FILE: FURTHER RESOURCES**

**Guidelines**
- ISO 14004 – Environmental management systems (General guidelines)
- ISO 14015 – Environmental management (Environmental assessment of sites and organisations)
- HB 206 – Initial Environmental Review (handbook)

**Starting points**
- ISOeasy – www.ecomapping.org
- Industry associations

**Third parties**
- JAS-ANZ – Information about certification companies (www.jas-anz.com.au)
- RABQSA – Information about certified auditors (www.rabqsa.com)