

Environmental Management Systems: In Pursuit of Continuous Improvement

by Jill Gilbert

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of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) describes how her agency introduced an EMS into its own regulatory work and day-to-day business, implementing ISO 14001 initiatives at four sites. The EMS has proven invaluable by changing the way the agency thinks, and the way it communicates with stakeholders, such as industry, local government, EPA, and the environmental community. The EMS also has provided focus in an agency where staff resources have

declined 30% over the past six years. Bangert describes how WDNR applied ISO 14001 requirements to the state's waste management program and the challenges they encountered. And she offers this advice to other state regulatory agencies considering an EMS: Go for it, with deliberation.

In "An Environmental Management Information System That Mitigates Risk for Southern Power" on page 22, Brian Toth presents an industry case study of how a utility automated its EMS using state-of-the-art software. He describes how Southern Power leverages technology to meet both regulatory compliance and EMS continuous improvement objectives. Southern Power evaluated diverse options for its environmental management information system (EMIS) from internally installed client/server solutions to "hosted" Web-based solutions. The EMIS is a tool that automates data collection, analysis, distribution, retention, and reporting—an integral element of an EMS. Ultimately, Southern Power selected a commercial hosted solution that best met the company's needs. The software is flexible and configurable, and provides benefits in the areas of institutional knowledge capture, training management, document management, and reporting. Automating these environment, health, and safety business processes has streamlined operations, saving time, enhancing compliance, and ultimately, reducing business risk. **em**

This month, *EM* explores the world of environmental management systems (EMSs), with three in-depth feature articles. With its broad organizational reach, cutting across all aspects of the environmental (and often, health and safety) business, the familiar EMS "plan-do-check-act" cycle has a growing number of companies in search of continuous improvement.

Starting on page 12, Teresa Savage-Tate presents "Getting the Most Value from Your Environmental Management System," in which she considers the reasons organizations might choose to implement EMSs. Whatever drives an organization to implement an EMS, these systems can help business achieve competitive advantage with strategies that improve financial, environmental, and social performance. To make sure that an EMS delivers value, organizations need to understand their objectives and seek tangible benefits. The article provides an excellent overview of EMSs, including the various models and standards, from the well-known ISO 14001 standard to the American Chemistry Council's Responsible Care specifications, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and state initiatives. In a sidebar to the article, Savage-Tate summarizes upcoming changes to the ISO 14001 standard.

Speaking of state initiatives, nearly 20 states now have EMS programs. In "Using ISO 14001 to Define Wisconsin's Waste Management Policy" on page 18, Suzanne Bangert