

WHAT IS AN AGRICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (EMS)?

Karl Hakanson ^{1/}

Environmental Management Systems, or EMSs have been widely used in industry with the stated goal of continual improvement of environmental performance. Together with a diverse group of agricultural, environmental, education and regulatory stakeholders, our office is developing comprehensive environmental management systems for Wisconsin farms. The principles are equally applicable to agri-chemical dealers and applicators, although many of the specifics are unique. Management systems can also include business priorities like product quality, employee health and safety and marketing.

An EMS is a powerful performance-based decision-making system that covers all levels of farm management, from daily operations to long range planning. An EMS:

- ! Focuses on environmental stewardship and business efficiency.
- ! Is farmer-directed and voluntary.
- ! Gives you a way to organize, prioritize, document, improve and take credit for environmental performance.

An EMS works by building on what is already in place (like soil conservation, nutrient management, grazing plans and practices, and a farmer's knowledge and experience). Based on a continual cycle of PLAN - DO - CHECK - ACT, the EMS supports a farmer in targeting and responding to areas of inefficiency and risk. Because it is a cycle, the EMS allows a farmer to begin by addressing just one or two priority issues and then building on that success in order to continually improve an operation.

What Does An EMS Cost?

The amount of money to develop an EMS is often minimal. Mostly, an EMS will take time. You may devote 4 - 8 hours each month for the next 6 to 9 months to develop EMS steps in order to:

- ! Determine the regulatory status of your operation.
- ! Assess and prioritize environmental issues.
- ! Develop a plan for needed improvements, maintaining good practices; how to prevent and deal with emergencies.
- ! Establish how you will communicate the steps of the plan to your family, employees, neighbors and those providing services to the farm.
- ! Determine how you will document your activities and use those records for review and continuous improvement.

An EMS will tell you where you need to spend money to make your operation run more smoothly while safeguarding the environment. An EMS may save you money in the long run, especially if you are thinking about expanding your operation. The cornerstone of an effective EMS is that *reducing waste and improving business efficiency go hand-in-hand with environmental perfection.*

^{1/} Environmental Resources Center, Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison,

Benefits of an EMS

- ! Improved environmental performance
- ! Increased business efficiency
- ! Improved neighbor and community relations
- ! Lower insurance premiums
- ! Full regulatory compliance
- ! Maintained or increased access to markets for your products
- ! Maintained or increased property value
- ! Better access to investment capital
- ! Protection of health for farm family and workers
- ! Peace of mind; Satisfaction
- !

For more information, contact:

Karl Hakanson, 303 Hiram Smith Hall, 1545 Observatory Dr., Madison, WI 53706
Telephone – 608-265-3473
Email – kihakanson@wisc.edu
Web page – <http://www.uwex.edu/farmandhome>