

Guide from

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[Insert a line about your business here]

**Essential guide to introducing an environmental management system**

An environmental management system (EMS) allows you to monitor and control the effect your business has on the environment. It demonstrates your commitment to customers, provides reassurance that you are complying with environmental regulations, and can help you find more efficient ways to operate.

While creating and managing an EMS may sound time-consuming, once you get the basics right you can merge it into day-to-day tasks.

**1. What an EMS is**

**An EMS focuses on how your business can minimise or improve its impact on the environment**

* Setting up and running an EMS is simply a question of reviewing what impact your business, products, services and processes have on the environment, identifying ways to make improvements and creating a framework to make sure they happen.
* It's a similar process to setting up and managing a health and safety or quality control policy.

**An EMS ensures you are complying with environmental regulations**

* Regularly checking compliance with environmental law is a key part of a successful EMS. Having an EMS in place reduces the risk of overlooking any new regulations.

**It provides a structure to communicate environmental issues to staff and management**

* If you follow the basic EMS processes, getting environmental, efficiency and regulatory issues across to staff is made easier than adopting a piecemeal approach.

**2. Benefits of an environmental system**

**Efficiency gains**

* Introducing and managing an EMS will involve reviewing how you carry out all your business functions with an eye to making them less wasteful. You may find easier and quicker ways to carry out common tasks as part of the review.

**Direct cost savings**

* You may find ways to cut costs and reduce waste, in areas as diverse as water and energy use, through packaging and recycling, to cheaper raw materials.

**Legal compliance**

* Reviewing your responsibilities under environmental legislation can minimise the risk of breaking the law unintentionally. Your EMS will need regular reviews which will highlight any new regulations.

**Marketing benefits**

* An EMS shows customers that you take your environmental responsibilities seriously. If you choose to get your EMS externally certified, you may find it easier to sell to 'green' consumers, bigger businesses or local and central government.

**3. Types of EMS**

**Your own in-house system**

* You can run your own in-house EMS, basing it on the general principles of environmental management.
* You can devote as much time and resources to this as you choose. Its effectiveness will be directly linked to how carefully created and well-managed it is.
* If you are selling to environmentally-aware customers or government departments, bear in mind this may not be sufficient to meet their requirements – you may need an accredited EMS.

**Accredited systems**

* You can get your EMS certified by external bodies, which will give it more weight in the eyes of customers and suppliers.
* You will have to be thorough in setting up your system, show a tangible commitment to environmental issues, and prove that you are maintaining and improving your EMS as time passes.
* [ISO 14001](http://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/iso-14001-environmental-management/) is the internationally recognised standard for environmental management systems. It independently verifies that you understand environmental issues, have a policy, manage it and plan around it, check and correct any problems, and regularly review it.
* If you meet the requirements of ISO 14001 certification, you can also consider getting your system recognised by the EU's [Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/emas/index_en.htm), which is a Europe-wide scheme that certifies you comply with all relevant environmental regulations and continuously improve your environmental performance.
* As the principles of both certification schemes are similar, you can work towards and hold ISO 14001 and EMAS certification simultaneously for maximum marketing effect.

**4. Working with external organisations**

**Consider using consultants to set up and manage an EMS**

* For many small businesses, an EMS can quite easily be created and run in-house. If your business is large, complex or has significant environmental impact, you may choose to use external help to set up and manage your EMS.
* Consultants can help on a range of levels, from giving simple advice through to creating, implementing and auditing systems and providing staff training.

**If you want to build a scheme yourself, consider ISO 14005**

* This provides guidelines for a flexible, phased implementation of an EMS.
* ISO 14005 can be used as a route towards meeting the requirements of ISO 14001 and EMAS.
* ISO 14005 replaced BS 8555, the previous standard for small businesses that want to create an EMS.

**Make sure any certification body you use is accredited**

* Check with the [United Kingdom Accreditation Service](https://www.ukas.com/find-an-organisation/).

**5. Business processes**

**Conduct a 'baseline' assessment**

* A baseline assessment is a thorough review of the current environmental impact of your business. The more detailed the assessment, the more likely it is you will find improvements and efficiencies.
* Get as many people from your business involved as you can – it's easy for one person to miss key elements.
* If you can see a 'quick win' as a result of the baseline assessment, such as an easy way to cut energy consumption, consider putting it into place immediately.

**Assess your business premises**

* For example, do you have a drainage plan? Where do you store chemicals? Do you have chimneys coming from boilers or production equipment? If so, where are they situated and what impact might they have with different wind directions? Do you have a car park? Are there any areas where spillages are frequent?

**Review your business processes**

* It's a good idea to work up some flow charts that cover every stage of your business processes and consider each step's environmental impact.
* For example, if you are manufacturing, what raw materials are you sourcing and where from? What additives are you using and what type are they? What sort of fuels are you using?
* If you provide services, how are you physically delivering these? How do you keep in touch with your customers? Are you travelling extensively or mainly using the phone?
* Remember to think about things you influence as well as the things you do – for example, the type of raw materials you choose to use and where you buy them from. Using a local supplier may have less environmental impact.
* Consider your firm's negative impact on air quality, land contamination and use, water use, waste, chemicals and fuel management, nuisance, effect on local flora and fauna, and use of resources such as packaging, tools, equipment and energy.
* With each of your business processes, estimate any potential or actual environmental impact, such as the emissions generated by running two delivery vans or expelling 200 litres of wastewater per hour.

**Examine possible risks**

* Check your health and safety policy for environmental risks you have already covered, such as chemicals handling or waste management.
* Consider the possibility of environmental impacts that may not be covered by your existing policies, such as flooding or air pollution.

**Use benchmarking to assess your current environmental performance**

* Comparing your environmental performance to your peers will indicate the overall size of the task and give you initial targets where your performance needs improvement.

**6. Environmental regulations**

**Check which environmental regulations apply to you**

* There may also be codes of practice for your industry that you need to follow.

**Work through the regulations and ensure you are complying**

* Carefully check each regulation and how you are handling its requirements.
* Examine whether there are better ways you can do it. For example, while you're checking if you are meeting packaging waste regulations, examine whether you can change your processes to cut waste or eliminate the requirement completely.

**7. Plan your EMS**

**Start to build your plan**

* Use what you've uncovered from your baseline assessment and regulatory check to identify what measures you want to put in place.
* Create clear and achievable targets. For example, a manufacturing business may set a target of cutting energy use to below its sector average within the next 12 months.

**Get your key people involved**

* Ask employees for their own recommendations on how to improve your environmental performance.
* Involve anyone who will be responsible for meeting the targets. Make sure they agree the targets that you are considering setting and have a clear idea of how to achieve them.

**Formalise a policy document**

* It needs to clearly show what the key objectives are, who has overall responsibility for meeting them and how you intend to meet your targets.
* Set clear timescales for reviewing the progress of the EMS. It will help you manage it more effectively. If you want your EMS to be certified, it's essential to show that you are regularly reviewing and looking to improve it.

**8. Put your EMS into action**

**Make management responsibilities clear**

* You need to ensure that any management team is committed to it. Having involved relevant individuals at the planning stage will help secure this.
* Delegate as much responsibility for targets as possible. For example, ensure production management know they are responsible for meeting any waste-reduction targets.

**Spread responsibility widely**

* The more people in your business who feel a responsibility for your EMS, the greater its chances of success.
* Brief all your staff on the whole EMS and their specific responsibilities under it.
* Consider running training sessions for practical issues and make sure every member of staff has a copy of the policy.
* If some targets will result in cost savings, you can consider giving staff incentives to meet them.

**9. Review and improve**

**Schedule reviews as outlined in the policy**

* Clearly defined timescales for reviews and targets will focus everyone's efforts on getting the policy working.
* Don't delay reviews – it will seem as if you're not treating the EMS as a priority.

**Check whether the targets are being met**

* Check progress informally from time to time to uncover any potential problems.
* Establish audit systems and check progress against targets regularly. You have to prove you are operating these systems if you want your EMS to be certified.
* When the formal review is due, make it clear that you expect to meet the targets.
* If targets haven't been met, try to find out why. If you need to approach the target differently, don't be afraid to do so, but set another clear target and a revised deadline.

**Get as much feedback as you can**

* Get staff opinions on the parts of the EMS that are relevant to them. Remember that people doing the jobs may come up with better ways to achieve your objectives.

**Revise your policy**

* Build a new policy document as part of the review, taking into account any successes and failures.
* If you've achieved a target, can you push it further or do you just want to see the progress maintained?
* If you've missed a target, make it clear who is responsible for meeting it, how and when.
* Just like the original policy, circulate it to everyone in the business and spend time making sure everyone is committed to it and knows their role.

**10. EMS day to day**

**Integrate your EMS into day-to-day processes**

* Look for obvious links to existing policies and working arrangements. It's likely that many of the issues you cover in your EMS can be absorbed into existing practices.
* For example, improvements to waste management can be incorporated into existing tasks, job descriptions and ways of working. Or better ways of handling chemicals can be written into your health and safety document.

**Make the changes clear**

* If you're changing existing policies and processes, such as health and safety or quality control, ensure everyone involved knows about the change. Consider running training or awareness exercises with revised documentation.
* Remember, your EMS is more likely to be successful if the changes just become another aspect of everyday working life.

**Continue running the EMS at management level**

* While most provisions of the EMS can be absorbed into day-to-day working practices, it's a good idea for management to retain the concept of the EMS in their minds to make sure the targets contained within it are still in focus.
* If you want your EMS to be certified, you need to show how you are operating, reviewing and improving it. This means you will need to continue the regular review process and keep associated paperwork for the certification process up to date.

**Signpost**

* Find an [accredited certification body](https://www.ukas.com/find-an-organisation/) through United Kingdom Accreditation Service (01784 429000).
* Find [Environment Agency](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency/services-information) services and information for businesses in England and Wales (03708 506 506).
* Find [Scottish Environment Protection Agency](http://www.sepa.org.uk/) services and information (03000 99 66 99).
* Get information from the [Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/) (0300 200 7852).

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