

Implementing environmental management systems

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The future of Australian agriculture will in part rely on our ability to validate the claim of producing “clean and green” commodities. This requirement will not only come from trading partners but local communities and ethical investors, determined to see a sustainability of the industry.

AEMS has worked in the development of Environmental Management Systems (EMS) for aerial agriculture, cotton growers, broadacre farmers, state and federal government departments, chemical companies and in the registration of products for the National Registration Authority, chemical companies and the National Residue Survey.

The focus of AEMS work has been in areas where chemical application and associated risks are relatively high (see January and March editions of The Australian Cottongrower) with EMS implementations in aerial agriculture, for the Fire Ant Control Centre (FACC) for QDPI and for the Australian Plague Locust Commission (APLC).

The cotton industry has developed and implemented an industry-wide “EMS” in the form of the Best Management Practices (BMP) program in response to the environmental management requirements. Through the BMP program the common environmental risks of cotton producers have been addressed with management programs.

This is an industry initiative based on a simple format of environmental management system, although many aspects of the more recognised EMS such as ISO 14001 have been omitted.

The international standard for environmental management systems, ISO 14001, is the preferred system for many industries and for many of our trading partners. It is a non-specific standard able to be adapted to any organisation that has significant environmental risks. It is focused on continuous improvement and sustainability within the organisation and the



Australian agriculture needs to back up its claim of producing 'clean and green commodities'.

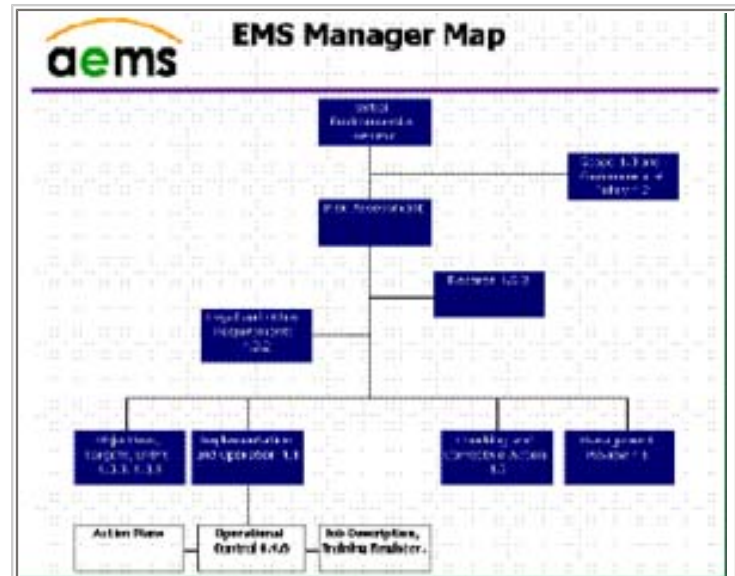


FIGURE 1: AEMS EMS Manager Navigational Map, and some of the key linkages between components of ISO 14001

industry in which it is implemented.

Many organisations within the cotton industry are already very familiar with the ISO 9000 series for quality assurance and are concerned about the need for another ISO system, with its associated burden of paperwork and time.

The burden of time, financial costs and resources required to implement and most importantly maintain an EMS has been seen across all of AEMS clients and through the cotton industry at large. The time spent in implementing and maintaining an EMS can be a hindrance to meeting the objective of environmental improvement. That is, meeting the documentation requirements removes the focus from the ultimate objective of better environmental management.

This has been overcome with the development of AEMS EMS Manager. This is being used by numerous clients across aerial agriculture, in federal and state government departments and in broadacre in general. Australia's largest cattle producers are using EMS Manager to markedly reduce documentation and times for implementation of ISO 14001 on cattle stations. The use of EMS Manager is allowing organisations to focus on the daily tasks and business management while improving environmental performance with minimal requirement for documentation.

This is possible through the use of a database structure that effectively links all the components of ISO 14001. AEMS have developed an application that is capable of storing, maintaining and simplifying the management of the organisation when complying with ISO 14001.

AEMS have the associated experience and a practical knowledge of the requirements of ISO 14001 and environmental management and this combined with the use of AEMS EMS Manager allows for rapid and effective implementation and maintenance of an ISO 14001 system. Many companies that have already implemented ISO 9000, an alternative QA program or an Occupational Health and Safety program (O H & S) are using AEMS EMS Manager to integrate all existing systems and implement an EMS concurrently.

Specific customisation of the software can also be achieved on an industry basis or through defined grower groups. The major benefits

associated with electronic implementation and management of the system is minimal replication of information due to the database structure, simple incorporation of procedures, occupational health and safety and any other requirement of the organisation.

This effectively leads to a reduction in the time to implementation and in the volumes of documentation. This allows the organisation to focus on achieving good business and environmental management rather than following endless paper trails.

If you would like further information on implementation of an EMS or ISO 14001, please do not hesitate to contact AEMS at 07 4613 0455 or aems@bigpond.net.au.