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# U.S.D.A. Forest Service

## Rocky Mountain Region (Region 2)

### EMS FAQs

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The two FAQs below are works-in-progress. The first addresses questions about EMS in general that we have heard. The second focuses on questions at the intersection of EMSs, ISO, and the Forest Service. Please feel free to share your suggestions and questions with anyone on the EMS Communication Team (Martha Delporte, Gwen Ernst-Ulrich, Elaine Leyda).

### Basic EMS FAQ

#### Q1. What is an environmental management system?

**A1.** An environmental management system (EMS) is an organizational problem-identification and problem solving tool that:

1. Is a continual means of improving an organization's environmental performance.
2. Integrates responsibilities and practices into one overall system to increase efficiency and reduce environmental impact.
3. Incorporates people, procedures, and work practices in a formal structure to ensure that an organization's important immediate and long-term environmental impacts are identified and addressed.
4. Focuses on constant system improvement and involves a continual cycle of planning, implementing, reviewing, and improving the processes and actions that an organization undertakes to meet its mission and environmental goals.
5. Allows for flexibility and adaptability so that environmental management decisions can be based on organizational-specific needs, resources, missions, and goals.

An EMS helps us better track our compliance with environmental requirements and focus on the most urgent environmental issues that we can affect or influence. An EMS is also a process that centers on five core functions:

- Environmental Policy
- Plan: Planning
- Do: Implementation and Operation
- Check: Checking and Corrective Action
- Act: Management Review

Federal agencies are required to develop and implement EMSs that meet the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14001 requirements. The ISO defines an EMS simply as "the part of the overall management system that includes organizational structure, planning activities, responsibilities, practices, procedures, processes, and

resources for developing, implementing, achieving, and reviewing and maintaining the environmental policy.”

**Q2. What is the ISO?**

**A2.** The ISO is the source of the ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 families of quality and environmental management standards and some 15,000 International Standards for business, government and society. ISO is a network of national standards institutes from 146 countries working in partnership with international organizations, governments, industry, business, and consumer representatives.

**Q3. What does ISO 14001 require?**

**A3.** ISO 14001 requires that we a) Establish and maintain an environmental policy, b) Establish and maintain a structured management system that implements the environmental policy, and c) Address the elements of the ISO standard 14001 (an EMS must include the 17 elements required in ISO 14001—see Q7).

**Q4. What is an environmental policy, and why is it important?**

**A4.** An environmental policy is a concise statement that conveys our values and commitment to environmental protection and compliance and continual improvement. Conforming to our environmental policy and ISO EMS requirements means working to protect human health and the environment; to meet objectives and targets established through the EMS; and to pursue improvement.

**Q5. How do you integrate the environmental policy into your work activities?**

**A5.** We integrate the policy by implementing EMS requirements into our work planning and following work-control procedures.

**Q6. How is environmentally-related information communicated in our Region?**

**A6.** Environmental information is shared through e-mail; family, safety, and staff meetings; tailgate sessions; and our Web sites.

**Q7. What are the 17 EMS elements required by ISO 14001?**

**A7.** They are:

1. Environmental policy
2. Environmental aspects
3. Legal and other requirements
4. Objectives and targets
5. Environmental management program
6. Structure and responsibility
7. Training, awareness, and competence
8. Communication
9. EMS documentation
10. Document control
11. Operational control
12. Emergency preparedness and response
13. Monitoring and measurement

14. Nonconformance and corrective and preventive actions
15. Records
16. EMS audit
17. Management review

For more information about these elements, see <http://www.epa.gov/ems/info/elements.htm>.

**Q8. Where can I see some examples?**

**A8.** There are examples of the 17 elements on the WWW, such as the Peer (Public Entity Environmental Management System Resource Center) at <http://www.peercenter.net/additionalresources/> and other resources listed in the Appendix E.

**Q9. What's a management review?**

**A9.** A management review is a periodical review of the EMS by top management to ensure that the EMS is operating as planned, and is suitable, adequate, and effective. ISO element 4.6 requires periodical EMS review by top management. Some results and records of management review can include: agendas, attendance records, minutes, and documented agreed-on action items.

The organization needs to ensure that, in the review, the following are considered and discussed:

1. Results of internal audits (EMS and compliance)
2. External communications
3. Environmental performance
4. Status of objectives and targets
5. Status of corrective and preventive actions
6. Follow up on actions from previous management reviews
7. Changing conditions or situations
8. Recommendations for improvement

**Q10. What is an internal audit? Who does it?**

**A10.** An EMS must undergo periodic internal audits (ISO 14001 requirement 4.5.5.). This procedure could include methodologies, schedules, checklists and forms, and processes used to carry out the audits. The purpose of this audit is to determine whether the system conforms to the other requirements of ISO 14001 and to the organization's own EMS detailed requirements, and if the EMS has been properly implemented and maintained. The procedure for internal audits has to address responsibilities and requirements for planning and executing the audits, reporting results, and what records will be generated (and maintained in accordance with 4.5.4). The procedures also address determination of audit scope, how often they will be conducted, and specifically how they will be done.

Auditors need to be selected so that objectivity and impartiality of the audit process are ensured. An internal audit is carried out by persons who are not involved in the unit or the EMS's development and implementation. The auditors must be objective and impartial.

See Q9 above. For example, the PSICC might request an internal audit be carried out by another Forest.

**Q11. What is certification? How is it different from accreditation?**

**A11.** “Certification” refers to the issuing of written assurance (the certificate) by an independent, external body that has audited an organization's management system and verified that it conforms to the requirements specified in the standard. “Registration” means that the auditing body then records the certification in its client register. For practical purposes, in the ISO 14001 contexts, the difference between the two terms is not significant and both are acceptable for general use.

Certification is not compulsory. An organization can develop and implement an EMS without seeking to have its management system audited and certified by an independent, external certification body. The Forest Service is not seeking certification at this time.

## Region 2

### Forest Service-EMS FAQ

Definitions from ISO 14001:2004:

Environmental aspect: Elements of an organization's activities or products or services that can interact with the environment. A *significant* environmental aspect has or can have a significant environmental impact.

Environmental impact: Any change to the environment, whether adverse or beneficial, wholly or partially resulting from an organization's environmental aspects.

**Q1.** What scope of activities, services or products provided by a Forest will their EMS focus on?

**A1.** The Forest can choose the scope of its activities, products and or services that impact the environment but our planning regulation (2005) describes that this scope consider, at a minimum, the "land management planning process." A presidential executive order also requires that we will have an EMS in place for our facilities. We consider that eventually each Forest will have one EMS that will address both facilities and some subset of what we enact through land management planning.

**Q2.** How do you determine what to focus on? There are different views and opinions about what kinds of activities or services should become the focus of a particular Forest's EMS. How will each Forest decide and prioritize their environmental aspects?

**A2.** A Forest's EMS will not be focused on everything that affects the environment. Each Forest will establish, implement, and maintain a procedure to identify environmental aspects and to determine, from those, significant environmental aspects.

Each Forest will develop a set of criteria, or a set of screens, that they will use to isolate the most "significant" activities or services. The term "significant" in an EMS context means "important" and is related to the criteria or screens that each Forest develops. This allows each Forest to address its own unique circumstances.

Each Forest compiles a list of environmental aspects: the activities, products and services the Forest provides that are in the EMS scope. The Forest EMS Team then applies the criteria or screens to the broader list of aspects. This process results in the "significant aspects" and these become the focus of the EMS.

**Q3.** What will be shared with the public?

**A3.** An EMS is designed to be a transparent system. Currently four Forests in Region 2 are undergoing Forest Plan revision. Three of these revision Forests must have their EMSs in place and through an internal audit by September 2006 when their Forest Plan Revisions are scheduled to be completed. The fourth forest has additional time to

develop and implement their EMS by September 2007. Given this less aggressive timeline, public involvement during EMS development will be better accommodated.

**Q4.** Who are the EMS point-people or contacts for the three Forests undergoing Plan revision?

**A4.** Pike and San Isabel National Forests, Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands

- Tom Peters, Springfield and La Junta, CO  
719-523-6591
- Tony Edwards, Pueblo, CO  
719-553-1417

Grand Mesa and Uncomphagre and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG),

- Larry Hill, Delta, CO  
970-874-6673

San Juan National Forest

- Cathleen Zillich, Durango, CO  
970-385-1239

**Q5.** Will an EMS result in a re-organization of personnel?

**A5.** As units develop their EMSs, management may decide to reorganize their workload. Because an EMS is a management tool, it may provide managers with options they had not considered previously and that may result in some changes in employees' duties. The impact is expected to be a negligible impact to the majority of Forest employees.

**Q6.** How will the Forest Service pay for EMS given that the budgets are declining and workloads are increasing?

**A6.** An EMS does not pick new things to do; it focuses managers' attention on things we have said are of very high importance and worthy of management attention and emphasis. Monitoring is not created by EMS. We will only be emphasizing monitoring that is an operational control and is therefore already required. An EMS should be multi-financed, reflecting the areas of EMS emphasis. An EMS can help identify areas that the agency has difficulty funding or completing;. This is one value of an EMS—to get that feedback to a manager so that necessary management changes can be made. An EMS does not judge performance; it illuminates whether we are doing what we said or not, and if not, it focuses managers' attention on changes or corrections. An EMS does not prescribe what changes should be made.

**Q7.** Will each Forest have its own unique environmental policy?

**A7.** That's not yet been decided. The Washington Office has developed an example that is in the interim directives (FSM 1331). The directives are expected to be finalized by the end September 2006.

**Q8.** Will there be consistency among EMS in the Forest Service, BLM, and other federal agencies. and also among their environmental policies?

**A8.** We are in the very early stages of developing our initial EMSs. Consistency across the Forest Service and with other federal land management agencies is being discussed

but all of us are in the early stages of development. We are working very closely with BLM in light of our shared service organizations in parts of this Region.

**Q9.** When does collaboration take place?

**A9.** The three revision Forests are collaborating with their publics as they develop their revisions. Given the aggressive timeline for completing the EMSs before finalizing the revised Forest Plans, EMS-related interaction with the public may be less than optimal. We anticipate that the public will have an opportunity to see and provide input to Forest EMSs as they are being developed. EMSs are works in progress and are subject to change over time. They typically change substantially after they are first developed and implemented because people can see whether the processes they have developed need changing. As future Forest Plan revisions are started, the Forest Service will be in a better position to collaborate with the public about EMSs as they are developed.

**Q10.** What are the module teams, and what are they doing?

**A10.** The Region has developed a strategy to help Forests with rapid development of their EMS to meet the aggressive timeline associated with the completion of Forest Plan Revisions. Small, focused regional teams are developing single-aspect material for EMSs that can be adapted for use by the Forests. The teams are creating templates for these aspects that can then be used by each Forest, to lessen repeat efforts on each unit. The teams are focusing on monitoring, training, operational controls already in place, and cross-walking those to requirements of ISO 14001. Module teams are working on aspects, such as invasive species, grazing, prescribed fire, timber harvest, travel management, and communications.

**Q11.** Does the Forest Service have the authority to require that permittees and contractors be ISO certified?

**A11.** Agencies do have that authority, but very few of them set requirements like that. The Park Service, for example, requires concessionaires to have an EMS and an external audit, but not ISO certification. A requirement of the ISO 14001 is that the Forest Service work with external entities involved with Forest Service business, resources and services to ensure they understand their role in the unit's EMS. Currently there are no plans (and none are anticipated) for the Forest Service to require permittees or contractors to be ISO-certified.

**Q12.** Might EMS training be required for permittees and contractors?

**A12.** Yes, training can be required by the agency but the agency will be responsible for providing whatever training or education is needed.

**Q13.** How does an EMS fit with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)?

**A13.** EMS is a management tool and not intended for making decisions regarding federal actions. If actions are required due to EMS actions, the responsible line officer will have to evaluate the level of NEPA analysis required before taking the actions.

**Q14.** What's the relation between Forest planning and an EMS?

**A14.** The EMS scope must consider, at a minimum, land management planning, which would include activities, services or products that might be considered in land management plans---but it is certainly not bound by them or limited to what is described in a Forest Plan. Because the 2005 Planning Rule requires the establishment of an EMS, there is some confusion and misinterpretation that an EMS is only for or about Forest Plans. The key relation is that an EMS must be established in order for a Forest to use the provisions of the 2005 Planning Rule.