

**VA ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND
GOVERNING ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

1. REASON FOR ISSUE

a. This directive establishes Department policy to ensure that VA Administrations and staff offices take necessary actions to become good stewards of the environment by integrating environmental accountability into day-to-day decision-making and long-term planning processes.

b. This directive also establishes policy and assigns responsibilities for developing and implementing environmental management systems at all appropriate VA facilities by December 31, 2005.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES. This directive sets forth Department-level policy and responsibilities related to the management of environmental programs. It contains information on the following:

a. Policy statements regarding VA's commitment to protecting the environment while carrying out its mission to serve our Nation's veterans.

b. Development and implementation of environmental management systems.

c. Responsibilities of VA Administrations and staff offices to develop guidance and policy to implement the requirements of this directive.

3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE. Office of the Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Program Management and Operations (049M).

4. RELATED HANDBOOK. None.

5. RESCISSIONS. None.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/

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Assistant Secretary for
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/s/

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1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

a. The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) mission is to deliver quality health care to our Nation's veterans, provide benefits and services to veterans and their families, and honor veterans with final resting places and lasting memorials that commemorate their service to our Nation. In accomplishing this mission, VA is committed to preventing pollution, reducing waste, and conserving natural and cultural resources. The purpose of this directive is to establish VA policy to ensure that all necessary actions are taken to integrate environmental accountability into day-to-day decision-making and long-term planning processes across VA activities, functions, and services.

b. This directive also establishes policy and assigns responsibilities for developing and implementing an environmental management system (EMS) at all appropriate VA facilities by December 31, 2005, pursuant to Executive Order (EO) 13148, Greening the Government Through Leadership in Environmental Management. An EMS provides a systematic framework to identify and address the environmental aspects and impacts of an organization's work, ensure compliance with applicable environmental requirements, and determine opportunities for continual improvement.

2. POLICY. In conducting its mission to serve our Nation's veterans, it is VA's environmental policy to:

a. Encourage VA employees at all levels to be good stewards of the environment by complying with all applicable environmental requirements; preventing pollution; reducing waste; conserving energy, water, and other natural and cultural resources; and continually reviewing and improving VA environmental programs.

b. Ensure top management commitment and accountability through the incorporation of position description elements and performance standards/measures related to pollution prevention and environmental management for appropriate senior level managers and other employees who have responsibilities related to the management of environmental programs.

c. Have top managers provide necessary support, including funds and other resources, to ensure compliance by VA facilities with Federal, state, and local environmental requirements, including development and implementation of an EMS.

d. Utilize sustainable practices to eliminate, minimize, or mitigate adverse environmental impacts.

e. Evaluate and monitor the operation of VA facilities and incorporate policies and procedures necessary to reduce environmental vulnerabilities and ensure environmental compliance.

- f. Integrate pollution prevention, waste reduction, natural and cultural resource conservation, affirmative procurement/green purchasing, life cycle costing, and environmental compliance into planning, purchasing, and operating decisions, wherever practicable.
- g. Implement source reduction as the pollution prevention method of choice, or alternative methods of reuse, recycling, treatment of wastes, or proper disposal.
- h. Use natural resources efficiently and maintain and protect plant and wildlife habitat, consistent with VA's mission.
- i. Recognize that the development and construction of VA facilities must consider the unique conditions of the environment of which the facility is a part.
- j. Train all appropriate VA staff, as needed, to satisfactorily carry out the environmental responsibilities of their positions.
- k. Solicit input regarding environmental matters affecting the operation of VA facilities, as appropriate, from stakeholders including, but not limited to, staff, veterans, and the community.
- l. Develop and implement an EMS at all appropriate VA facilities by December 31, 2005.

(1) The environmental responsibilities of VA Administrations and staff offices differ in both scope and complexity. As such, Administrations and staff offices shall develop an EMS best suited to its needs and based on the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14001 or equivalent standard.

(2) For assistance, the Administrations and staff offices may use the Green Environmental Management System (GEMS) Guidebook developed by the Veterans Health Administration, Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N). The GEMS Guidebook presents a nine-step process based on the ISO 14001 Standard.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **The Assistant Secretary for Management (004) is the VA Environmental Executive** and will be responsible for environmental policy and oversight to coordinate implementation of the requirements of this directive at the Department level.

b. **The Office of Acquisition and Materiel Management (OA&MM), Office of the Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Program Management and Operations (049M),** will be responsible for providing program leadership, guidance, and coordination at the Department level to ensure that the requirements of this directive are appropriately implemented.

c. **VA Administrations and Staff Offices** will be responsible for the development, implementation, and management of an EMS and other environmental programs. Each VA Administration and staff office shall:

(1) Develop guidance and policy, as needed, to implement and manage environmental programs, including the requirements of this directive.

(a) Environmental policy is to be developed that specifically addresses the requirements contained in paragraph 2. Policy in this directive.

(b) Internally developed guidance and policy shall be consistent with applicable Federal, state, and local environmental requirements.

(2) Define “appropriate” facilities in accordance with EO 13148 and direct these facilities to develop and implement an EMS. The designation of “appropriate” facilities is to be based on facility size, complexity, and the environmental aspects of an individual facility’s operations. Appropriate facilities would generally include those that are either subject to registration or permitting by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or state/local environmental regulators or otherwise could have a significant impact on the environment.

(3) Staff offices that operate VA facilities in VA-owned or -leased space are responsible for determining which of their facilities are “appropriate” in accordance with the criteria stated in paragraph 3 (c) (2) (i.e., size, complexity, and environmental aspects) and for directing these facilities to develop and implement an EMS. Such an EMS shall address functions under the control of the staff office and be coordinated to the extent practicable with the owner of the space in which VA is a tenant.

(4) Develop a facility self-declaration protocol by December 31, 2004, that provides credible verification of the status of an EMS in accordance with guidance provided by the EPA, the Council on Environmental Quality, or other national standard recognized by EPA.

(5) Ensure that the requirements of this directive are implemented at the facilities for which they are responsible.

4. REPORTING. Each VA Administration and staff office shall report on the status of implementation of an EMS, including providing a list of “appropriate” facilities. Reports are due annually to OA&MM (049M) by January 31, or alternative date provided to meet EO 13148 reporting requirements.

5. REFERENCES

a. Executive Order 13148, Greening the Government Through Leadership in Environmental Management (April 21, 2000).

b. Green Environmental Management System (GEMS) Guidebook (March 2004).
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