

Follow-up to the Review of EC's Environmental Management System

November 2004

Report Clearance Steps

Follow-up process initiated	October 2003
Report completed	July 2004
Follow-up report approved by Departmental Audit and Evaluation Committee	November 4, 2004

Acronyms used in the report

AEB	Audit and Evaluation Branch
DAEC	Departmental Audit and Evaluation Committee
DEMP	Departmental Environmental Management Plan
EC	Environment Canada
EMP	Environmental Management Plan
EMS	Environmental Management System
MAP	Management, Administration and Policy

New Follow-up Process

As of the May 23rd (2003) meeting of the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Committee (DAEC) a new approach to follow-ups is being taken. While the practice in the past had been for the Audit and Evaluation Branch (AEB) to conduct them, it will now be the responsibility of the relevant program managers to conduct follow-ups to recommendations resulting from audits or evaluations of their own programs. The information provided by program managers will be monitored and validated by the AEB. The following report reflects these changes.

Context

This follow-up is being conducted five years after the report on the Review of Environment Canada's (EC) Environmental Management System (EMS), as earlier follow-ups were deferred at the program's request. The follow-up to the EMS Review is being done to determine the adequacy, effectiveness and timeliness of management action taken to implement the recommendations made in the initial Review. Follow-ups are important, as they give senior management a crucial indicator as to the implementation rate of recommendations and adjustments made in relation to the management responses.

Greening Government Operations Policy indicates the best way to improve performance and institute better management of greening issues is through the development and implementation of an EMS. An EMS is a system that provides a framework for monitoring and reporting on an organization's environmental performance.

Current Status

The main focus of the recommendations from the Review in 1998 was that improvements in the design of the EMS were necessary for its implementation. The lack of a Departmental Environmental Management Plan (DEMP) and individual organizational Environmental Management Plans (EMP) was of primary concern in the Review. Due to the absence of these plans, managers were not engaged in the EMS, risk-based management was not incorporated in the planning process, and responsibility and accountability were not clearly defined. There was also limited documentation, measuring and reporting on the EMS; as a result, the benefits of the EMS were not communicated to employees. Five years later, we still continue to require a departmental EMS.

This follow-up reveals that since the initial Review there have been important structural and organizational changes in EMS operations within EC. Such changes have not been conducive to the implementation of the initial Review recommendations. In fact, it has been said that "EMS fell under the radar screen for a couple of years while organizational changes were made in the Department". A retrospective review of the initial recommendations, due to the significant changes, precludes the utility of such an examination.

Although significant changes occurred, there was still some progress made in implementing a departmental EMS through the re-creation of the EMS organization, in November 2001, with a new Management, Administration and Policy (MAP) 'bottom-up/top-down' approach. From January to March 31st 2002, officers implemented EMS at the facility level in 15/18 facilities based on the ISO 14004. Manuals were developed at participating facilities, which undergo regular review from EMS officers. In June 2002, the Environmental Affairs Branch was created to integrate the former EMS Branch, the Environmental Operations in Governments Branch, the Federal House in Order Branch, and the Sustainable Development in Government Operations initiative. This year, the Environmental Affairs Branch, now responsible for EMS, has on three occasions made presentations to senior management (Environmental Management Board, MAP Operations, and MAP). This has resulted in a re-commitment to the EMS, specifically to renew a mandate and commitment for exemplary environmental performance in EC, integrated within an EMS. As a result of these changes, an analysis against the initial recommendations of the Review would be neither insightful nor useful to management.

In the past year, the Environmental Affairs Branch has been working to move the EMS agenda forward by positioning it in the context of a federal government Greening Government Agenda and a desire by Treasury Board to develop a performance management framework in this area. This will include regular horizontal performance reporting by departments, which of course requires an EMS. Success in such actions should permit a more strategic approach to EMS to emerge within the department.

Risks

Some of the actions taken by the program between 1998 and 2004 have been effective in reducing the risk posed to the Department related to the implementation of the EMS. Given the radically changed context for EMS and a newly developing government agenda, it would be prudent to focus on this new context. EC has committed to co-champion the Sustainable Development for Government Operations and the Department is a partner in the Federal House in Order – the governance for these has been combined to form Sustainable Federal House in Order. EC also co-chairs the government-wide EMS Task Group, created to promote the development and implementation of EMS in government organizations. The broader new direction the federal government is taking with its Greening Government Agenda should provide significant changes and impetus to advance the EMS agenda and allow EC to enhance its departmental EMS.

Recommended Actions

While the initial recommendations are dated, the essence of these recommendations still remains valid today; however, continued follow-ups will likely result in a similar outcome. In order to determine how best to proceed in this area a management decision is required to decide on a course of action for EMS within the department. Once this course of action is established and implemented an audit or evaluation will be considered in the future.

Management Response

Environment Canada will develop an Environmental Management System in the context of the Greening Government Agenda.

DAEC Decision

DAEC noted the absence of an EMS in the department. DAEC asked the Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources and Service Innovation to develop a plan supporting the development of an EMS and present this to Executive Management Counsel.