

Utility Using International Management Practices to Protect the Environment

Environmental management system comes to Tallahassee

Jamie Shakar
STAFF WRITER

How can a water or wastewater facility evaluate its environmental impacts?

How can resources be best targeted to respond to those issues?

To address those questions and similar concerns, the City of Tallahassee's Water Utility is participating in a voluntary international certification program, known as an Environmental Management System (EMS), for its Wastewater Treatment Division.

"While we have always been champions of the environment, this allows us to become even more proactive in our approach to potential impacts on natural resources," said Environmental Management Representative Koren Taylor, a professional geologist and the City's aquifer protection coordinator.

Like other water utilities nationwide, the City of Tallahassee faces new, often unprecedented challenges. Increasing regulations, service demands and development make it more important for service providers to use

state-of-the-art management approaches, particularly when responding to questions about environmental considerations.

An EMS provides a structured approach to manage a full range of activities to improve environmental performance. An EMS also helps identify more efficient ways to operate and reduce unnecessary risks and costs. Finally, using an EMS can help managers improve operations and build better relations within the community.

"I think the EMS will help us most with consistency of operations," said Taylor, "which leads to greater efficiency and effectiveness. I hope it will also lead to greater environmental awareness on a day-to-day basis."

The EMS is based on the ISO14001:2004 international standard. The Water Utility will seek certification to that standard later this year for the Wastewater Treatment Division.

An environmental management system is an ongoing process, explained Taylor. Since improvements can't all happen at once, the EMS provides a framework for rank-

EMS Benefits

- Improvements in overall environmental awareness, performance and compliance
- Increased efficiency, predictability and consistency in managing environmental obligations
- More effective targeting of environmental management resources (ex. training funds)
- Improved retention of institutional knowledge

ing potential environmental impacts so the most problematic can be addressed as priorities.

This ranking system analyzes six key components of effective environmental management and gives them a score from 1 to 4. Total scores reflect priority ranking of the environmental impacts.

With this system, the Utility can address key concerns immediately, complete projects and establish new goals. As a dynamic process, the EMS provides a mechanism for tracking success and continued improvement.

The EMS program is first being implemented in the Utility's Treatment Division.

"I've been pleased and impressed to see the professionalism of employees and their willingness to work with me on the program," said Taylor. "I think everyone

understands that this is an opportunity to show the community the high level of work that we do and the Utility's commitment to improve even more."

When certified this year, the EMS for the Treatment Division will be the first wastewater utility in Florida to receive the certification. Then other Water Utility Divisions will undergo the process to receive certification: Water Quality, Distribution and Collection, Engineering and Administration.

Keep an eye out for more announcements from the City as the Utility continues to implement this important program.

You can also watch WCOT Channel 13 and check your utility bill inserts for more information on the EMS.

To learn more, please contact Koren Taylor at 891-1200.