

WHITE PAPER

A Best Practices Guide to Environmental Health and Safety Management Systems



INTRODUCTION

When it comes to choosing an Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Management System for your organization, there is much to consider. Each EHS system is different from the next, with slight nuances here and there that may cause you to wonder which will provide the most value and prove to be truly effective...which to choose? To help aid in this decision, keep in mind that while all EHS systems differ, there are core traits that effective EHS systems share. These are the traits that will help to streamline your business processes, save you time, and ensure that safety and quality touches on all sites and locations within your company's enterprise.

This white paper will look into the traits of an effective EHS system as well as the best practices that should be built into the system to ensure a best in class process.

When making the decision of EHS software, look for systems that have the following characteristics:

Flexibility

Many systems may claim to be flexible but few can back up this claim. Flexibility in an EHS system encompasses many different things. It is the ability for the software to conform to your company's business practices, essentially molding itself to the way your company does things—instead of the other way around. Many times companies will find themselves sacrificing their traditional way of doing business to adapt to the software, which can be discouraging to the end user.

Flexibility means the ability to configure keywords, logins, and pages to your liking. It means allowing you to change the design of the software to make it your own. Don't take for granted how much further this can take user adaptability of the system.

While an important trait, determining flexibility is harder than you may think. When looking at EHS system vendors, most will provide a demo to show you the system's capabilities. While certainly useful, this may not be sufficient in itself. For example, some systems require IT assistance when making changes to the database, which ultimately negates the business value associated with flexibility. You would have no way of knowing this simply through viewing a demo. Look for a vendor that will provide you with a free trial of the software. This shows a vendor's commitment and confidence in the functionality of their product and provides assurance that you will get precisely what you are looking for in an EHS system.

User Adaptability

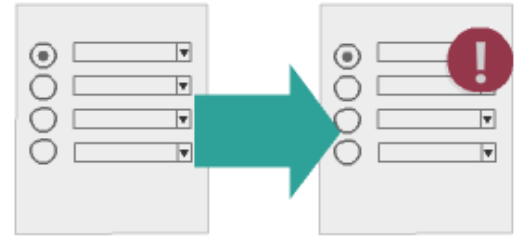
This trait goes hand in hand with flexibility as a highly flexible system will ultimately lead to user adaptability. User adaptability may seem like a fringe benefit but in actuality this plays a huge part in contributing to the overall success of the system. The more comfortable users are with their system, the more they will use it, leading to them becoming well-versed on EHS processes and in using the system in general.



Dynamic Workflow

A good EHS system starts with a dynamic workflow platform. This will enable the system to build on best practice applications and automate the process of collecting adverse events, taking corrective actions on those events as well as conducting audits and enabling document control.

Not only should your system have the standard workflows for EHS management, but it should also allow you to adjust its processes to your liking, in order to meet your unique business needs. Dynamic workflow will allow you to configure the workflows, forms, fields, and keywords so that they reflect the uniqueness of your company.



Scalability

Successful businesses are defined in part by growth—typically the more successful you are the more business you will bring in. This leads to a need for internal growth as well, resulting in more employees, more locations, and so on. Rarely is any part of a business operation static. It will experience continual growth, and your software system will be affected as well.

Therefore, when looking into EHS software, take into account the level of scalability of the system. EHS software should operate in a scalable environment, which will enable the system to grow in proportion to the business—ensuring that you never outgrow the software. Modular systems in particular are highly scalable as each piece of the software, or module, can be expanded as needed to accommodate additional users and locations.

Reporting

There is so much data coming into the EHS system that it is necessary to ensure a high level of visibility into this data. Creating visibility into EHS processes is key in fostering change within your organization. With so much information coming through in different areas, a process is needed to sort through and make sense of it. This is where Reporting comes in.

A good EHS system simplifies the process of reporting by automating the process for you. Reporting tools allow you to create report templates, generate scheduled or ad-hoc reports with drill down capabilities, and create reports in just minutes. It will ultimately enhance visibility into all areas in the business and shed light on any areas for improvement.

BUILT-IN PROCESSES FOR EHS MANAGEMENT

While these characteristics are important in an EHS system, it is equally important to have processes that can communicate with each other to enhance the overall visibility and collaboration within not just your organization but your enterprise.

Corrective Action

The Corrective Action system is a critical piece in resolving adverse events. Good corrective action starts with integration with a risk assessment tool. The Risk Management tool plays a very important part as it will basically tell the corrective action system which events are the most critical to the business and need to have a corrective action started. Any noncritical events can be dealt with immediately without opening a corrective action. This capability is important because without risk, or some method to catch the critical events, all events of varying levels of severity will be grouped together, and addressed in the order in which they came in. This can prove to be detrimental because you essentially lose visibility into the events that will have the most impact on your business. Built in risk management tools will let you apply risk levels to events, so you can prioritize by risk, making sure you don't let any critical events slip through the cracks while systematic issues run amuck.

Incidents

As part of the process of continual improvement in any organization it is important that all incidents are recorded, investigated and actions taken to prevent or reduce the chance of reoccurrence. The EHS system's Incidents module can be used to set up records of all incidents and to collect the required information to conduct investigations, including a risk analysis. In addition, Incidents data will be automatically inherited into the corrective action system, helping to prevent recurrence of incidents.

Document Control

The ability to control records within the organization is a key aspect of any business. This is where we keep documentation on our procedures and processes and other important documents that keep the business running. Manually doing this can be time consuming and prone to human error. We need to automate the process to ensure consistency each and every time, which will promote a standard process.

A Document Control system will let you track your documented processes, jobs, specifications, and more. Using Document Control you can create new documents, assign keywords to new documents, and attach files of all sizes and types. You can also create any number of workflows to route records through review and approval.

While it is important to have a central storage hub for all documents, it is also important to have the ability to easily make changes to all documents. Look for a system that includes a change request workflow to ensure that all document changes follow a standard procedure.

Once documents are in place, or revised documents in place, the next natural step is training. Document control that is linked to a Training System will ensure that employees are trained on all existing processes and procedures and are apprised of any changes to existing procedures or processes.

Employee Training

While the Training Management system can be integrated with Document Control, Training is also very beneficial in other aspects as well. Not only will the Training system link documents to training requirements, it will also let you manage and track all training events within your organization and enable you to conduct online testing with configurable pass/fail rules. The Training System also gives you the ability to configure training requirements as needed, import all employees into groups, and create training plans for all training events.

Training Management is a necessity in any business. Employees must be constantly trained on new or changing processes, and must be tested on their knowledge of those processes. The EHS system's Training tool is able to do this automatically, making the process of training your employees intuitive and much easier.

The capabilities inherent in the Training Management System will also allow you to set up training activities and manage training on all documents, procedures, specifications, work instructions and more.

Audits

To ensure continuous improvement within your organization, an Audits tool is invaluable. Auditing is a way of checking to make sure your internal processes are working the way they should. Companies should continually audit themselves throughout the year to ensure that this is the case.

When it comes to an internal auditing tool, look for a tool that is configurable to adjust to your business processes, and easy to manage and track. A good Audit Management system will let you create audit plans and set up multiple audits throughout the course of a year. The Audit Management tool will enable you to set up profiles for each audit along with integrated and configurable checklists and scoring methods. It will also enable you to create a comprehensive audit report for all audits.

The EHS system automates the processes of conducting audits, resulting in what the system does best—simplifying the process for you.

Risk Management

Within all organizations there lurks a common predator—risk. Risk is inherent in all organizations of all shapes and sizes. The goal is to define the risk and apply safeguards to prevent risk from occurring.

An EHS system's Risk Management tools are an ideal method of automating this process by enabling you to handle risk systematically. It does this by catching risk at the root cause, which will enable you to mitigate systemic issues. This is important because if you can see where the systemic issues lie, you can make the needed adjustments to mitigate those events, see where the trends are, and gain the tools and therefore the visibility to reduce risk dramatically in the long run, throughout all areas within your organization.

Using Risk Management, you can create risk templates, apply risk parameters, and integrate Risk into other EHS processes to filter and assess risk levels within adverse events. Risk gives you reign over Risk and give you the tools you need to contain it from the root cause, preventing the spread throughout your organization.

Another benefit of Risk Management tool is that it can integrate with a Corrective Action tool. This is essential because it will allow you to weed out the critical events from the noncritical, allowing you to see and open a corrective action for the events most detrimental to your business.

Once critical events have been addressed, the Risk Assessment tool ensures that the risk was reduced to an acceptable level ensuring that the measures taken proved successful.

SaaS Deployment

Many EHS system providers will provide different methods of deployment to fit your individual business needs. Software as a Service, or SaaS, is one of these methods. SaaS is a cost-effective method of deploying the EHS because it stores all data in the "cloud," eliminating traditional maintenance fees of on premises EHS solutions. What this basically means is that your data is not kept on your server, or hosted on your vendor's server. Rather, it is kept in the cloud, which is essentially a Web-based storage space for all of your documents and processes.

While the cloud is an effective means of managing EHS processes, don't stop there. Look for a dedicated cloud-based solution. A dedicated solution essentially gives you your own section of the cloud, rather than sharing it with others. The benefit is doing so is greater ability to scale the system because bandwidth is unlimited, enhanced security because no one has access to your portion of the cloud but you, and rapid deployment when getting started with your EHS. This low maintenance approach to deploying the EHS will result in cost-savings for your organizations without sacrificing value of the system.

4 STEPS TO DEPLOYING A COST-EFFECTIVE EHS

When looking into EHS Management solutions, there are four considerations to make to ensure you're getting a budget-friendly solution:

Write down your business requirements: Make sure the software fits your needs exactly by knowing what the most important traits are for your company and keeping them close at hand. Knowing the important points will keep you focused, ensuring you pay for only the functionality you need, not fringe benefits.

Look for a solution that is cloud-based: A cloud-based EHS solution provides the benefits of advanced technology, without the maintenance cost. Smaller organizations can leverage the cloud to gain access to the functionality of the EHS, minus the hefty upfront costs.

Look for a solution that is flexible: Many small to mid-sized businesses may not have an IT department or the budget to maintain extensive hardware architecture. Look for a solution that will let you make changes to the software on your own, with no programming required, which will save extensive IT costs in the future.

Try before you buy: We've all heard the old adage, "if it seems too good to be true, it probably is." Some vendors will take the extra step and support their claims by letting you try the software at no cost. Look for a vendor that will let you take the software before a spin before you commit, so you can decide for yourself whether the software is a fit for your organization.

CONCLUSION

The EHS system has the overlying traits, such as flexibility, dynamic workflow, and enterprise reporting that help to make every day business processes easier on you by automating the nuances involved in everyday tasks. Not only does it have overlying benefits, but it comes with built in processes to specifically address common business practices such as document management, auditing, risk assessment and more.

Using the EHS to automate these processes will result in a standard and consistent process that can be repeated to ensure all processes are effective, each and every time, allowing you to focus on growing your business...and succeeding.

ABOUT VERSE

Quality and compliance management software is becoming a growing requirement in businesses today. With the speed of the market ever-increasing, companies need solutions that will allow them to manage and track quality and compliance processes, while automating processes efficiently. VERSE was developed to enable organizations to gain these valuable tools in a cost-effective manner. VERSE has all the key quality processes such as document control, corrective action, audits, and training in a dedicated cloud environment. This means you have an enterprise quality management system in your own personal cloud. VERSE means versatility; quality management software for all.

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