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Environmental Management System is key to organizing Metro's sustainability efforts.

Metro Gets FTA Assistance to Set Up Environmental Management System

By Rich Martin
Staff Writer

(April 9, 2009) Metro has won federal assistance to assist in moving the agency closer to fully and systematically addressing compliance with environmental regulations.

Aid from the Federal Transit Administration will provide training assistance, consultation and implementation of an Environmental Management System (EMS), which is considered the gold standard in compliance.

An EMS is defined as a "continual cycle of planning, implementing, reviewing and improving the processes and actions that an organization undertakes to meet its business and environmental goals," according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Environmental Compliance and Services Department Manager Cris Liban, one of the overseers of the project for Metro, said the system is a "set of policies and procedures that captures the best practices" out there.

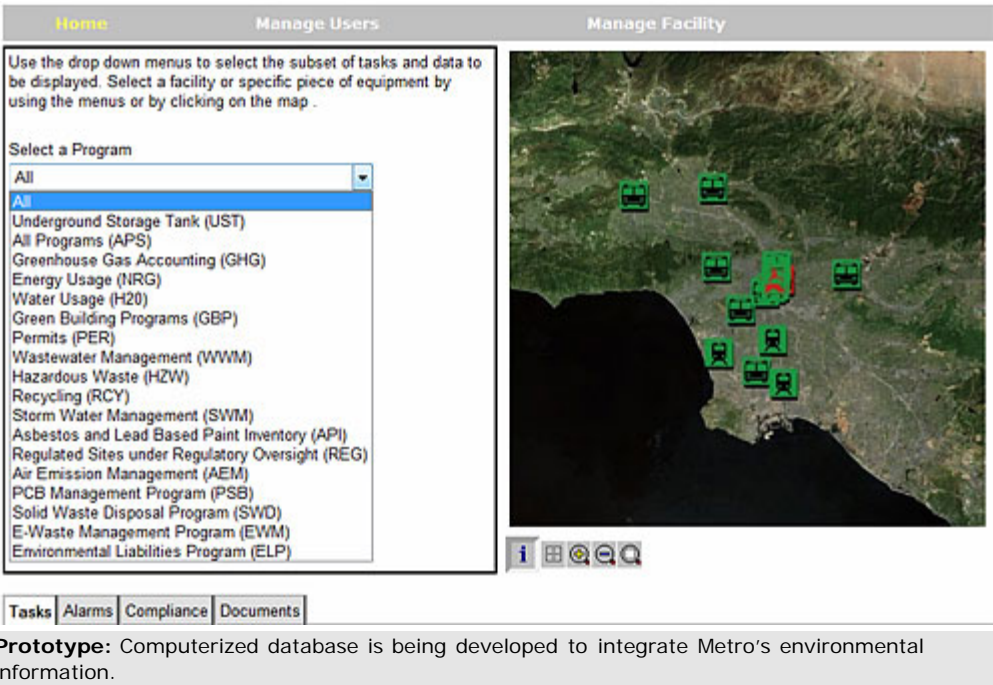
The system helps managers "look at how our employees are performing specific tasks." Implementation will help determine whether, for example, water and chemicals are being used correctly and whether storage procedures are correct. It can also reduce pollution and can reduce or mitigate risk.

EMS helps companies and agencies comply with environmental rules, and will identify any areas of concern.

Having an EMS will be a boon for Metro and the environment. Benefits include increased efficiency, a better environment for employees and a more environmentally friendly workplace. Other possible gains include lower operating costs, an enhanced public image, greater awareness of environmental issues and higher employee morale.



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency icon illustrates 'continual cycle of planning, implementing, reviewing and improving the processes and actions that an organization undertakes to meet its business and environmental goals.'



Series of workshops

Metro has designated a Core Team to participate in a series of quarterly workshops held at Virginia Tech in Roanoke, Va. These workshops are part of the FTA EMS assistance, providing the necessary skills to implement EMS at participating transit properties.

The initial FTA workshop was attended by 49 representatives from other transit properties. In addition to Metro, agencies represented include the city of Asheville, N.C.; MTA Maryland; Worcester (Mass.) Regional Transit Authority; Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority; Orlando (Fla.) LYNX; and Miami-Dade (Fla.) Transit. Three additional workshops have been scheduled for the rest of 2009.

Among the Core Team members who is attending the workshops is Equipment Maintenance Superintendent Michael Stange. Stange said his department “is a large waste generator” and dealing with that – especially hazardous waste – is “all in the vein of good environmental stewardship.”

Learning EMS helps “identify aspects,” which means discovering potential environmental issues before they become problems.

Parallel pilot programs at Metro Red Line, Division 10

Metro has selected the Red Line yard to be the pilot property to implement an EMS as part of this FTA-sponsored effort. Learning the proper EMS procedures helped Stange realize that one thing seen at the Red Line Yard was an “aspect” – a cleaning material bulk tank was just 60 feet from a storm drain. The material never made it into the storm drain, but it could have – and that’s the kind of enhanced awareness that EMS training can develop.

The training “can identify all those potential issues,” Stange said, calling the EMS “an “amalgamation of many different efforts and processes” in the field.

Metro’s EMS Core Team is not the sole developer of the EMS at the Red Line Yard. An EMS is unique to each facility and therefore, all of the employees and executives overseeing and operating those facilities should

mold the EMS to address their specific aspects.

An EMS allows an organization, large or small, to keep improving in various facets of environmental compliance. The EPA says “the concept of continual improvement assumes that no organization is perfect. While an EMS should help your organization to improve compliance and other measures of performance, this does not mean that problems will never occur. However, an effective EMS should help you find and fix these problems and prevent their recurrence.” The EPA promotes the use of an EMS to encourage compliance and prevents pollution.

One of Metro’s goals is to reach the standard of environmental compliance, ISO 140001 certification.

Another parallel pilot program involving the development of EMS is that for Division 10. The EMS being developed at Division 10 together with the Red Line Yard effort will become the EMS standard for bus and rail facilities, respectively. The Division 10 EMS is not using any FTA assistance.

Metro core members on the EMS initiative include Liban, environmental representative; Stange, Bus Operations representative; Donald Wong, administrative team member who is senior programming management analyst for Project Control and Administration; Wyman Jones, Rail Facilities Operations representative who is supervising engineer for Transit Systems Engineering; and K.N. Murthy, executive management representative who is deputy chief capital management officer for Executive Office, Construction.