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Release of EMS Database and Analysis of Baseline Data from 50 Facilities

Do “environmental management systems” used by businesses and governments to improve their environmental performance work in the real world? Nobody knows for sure. Because widespread adoption of EMSs by industrial and governmental facilities has the potential to change the nature of environmental regulation, the Environmental Law Institute and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill are engaged in a multi-year project to help answer that question through the creation of the National Database on Environmental Management Systems. NDEMS includes more than 50 pilot facilities that are implementing EMSs. The joint ELI-UNC project is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and a consortium of states known as the Multi-State Working Group.

Today, ELI and UNC are releasing the NDEMS database as well as a landmark study that contains a thorough analysis of the initial baseline data from the 50 facilities. The report, *The Effects of Environmental Management Systems on the Environmental and Economic Performance of Facilities*, covers the three years prior to the implementation of an EMS at each facility, including extensive data on each facility’s past environmental performance, compliance history, pollution prevention efforts, and involvement of external interested parties. The facilities, including some that are implementing EMSs based on the ISO 14001 international EMS standard, are located in 10 states and represent a variety of sizes, industries, and government agencies.

“The creation of NDEMS and our research based on it are designed to answer the fundamental question of whether implementation of an EMS changes a facility’s behavior in ways beyond those that are the result of standard environmental regulations,” said Suellen Keiner, Director of ELI’s Program on Environmental Governance and Management. EPA’s project manager for NDEMS, Jim Horne of the agency’s Office of Water, added: “We want the public and other researchers to have access to these data so they can build upon our analysis and determine for themselves the effects of EMSs.”

In addition to analyzing the baseline data, *The Effects of Environmental Management Systems* includes a summary of the major project mileposts and updated information on the demographics for the 50 pilot facilities. The report also describes upcoming project highlights, including preliminary details regarding the facilities’ EMS design activities.

Beyond analyzing information from the national database, the ELI-UNC researchers have conducted a number of site visits and in-person interviews with pilot facility managers and employees. Two facilities are the subject of detailed case studies in the report, and more case studies will be published later this year. “The case studies are crucial to the project because they provide a more complete understanding of EMS implementation,” said Horne. “The two case studies describe each facility’s EMS design process, motivations for developing its EMS, and the perceived costs and benefits of implementing an EMS.”

In the next phase of the NDEMS project, the ELI-UNC research team will be compiling data on the pilot facilities’ EMS designs, as well as the processes by which their EMSs are implemented. These data will be added to NDEMS, which will be updated every six months so that changes over time can be analyzed by the ELI-UNC team and other researchers.

The database and the report are available to the public for free at www.eli.org/isopilots.htm. The project Web site also includes background information on NDEMS, including the data collection protocols.

ELI is an independent research and educational organization based in Washington, D.C. The Institute serves the environmental professional in business, government, the private bar, public interest organizations, academia, and the press.