

VA Environmental Excellence Award for Fiscal Year 2005 Accomplishments

Summary: Healthcare Analysis and Information Group (HAIG) Environmental Survey

Executive Order 13148, Greening the Government Through Leadership in Environmental Management, directs that federal agencies develop and implement Environmental Management Systems (EMSs). To this end, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) developed an innovative program called Green Environmental Management Systems (GEMS) to address the Executive Order (EO) 13148 (Greening the Government Through Leadership in Environmental Management) requirement that federal agencies implement EMSs at “appropriate” facilities. Due to their significant environmental footprint, VHA has identified all VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) to be appropriate facilities.

In 2004, the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N) tasked the Healthcare Analysis and Information Group (HAIG) with conducting annual environmental surveys of all Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) and VAMCs. This survey is designed to meet a number of goals associated with GEMS including establishing a baseline to measure progress in the development, implementation, and management of GEMS. Additionally, this survey helps VHA to meet a number of other goals associated with GEMS including:

- Establishing a baseline to measure progress in developing, implementing, and managing GEMS.
- Documenting VHA’s achievements in its GEMS program.
- Communicating the support of VHA top management for the implementation of GEMS.
- Establishing VA and VHA environmental goals, objectives and targets.
- Providing VISN and VAMC field staff the opportunity to report on progress in meeting GEMS implementation and other environmental requirements.
- Identifying national strengths and opportunities for improvement.
- Providing benchmarks for VAMCs to assess their progress in meeting GEMS requirements.
- Identifying best practices.
- Providing a mechanism for agency-wide reporting of the status of GEMS implementation and compliance with EO 13148 to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Federal Environmental Executive.

The HAIG Environmental Survey is divided into three parts. VAMC senior management completes one portion of the survey and the VAMC GEMS Coordinator another. In addition, VISNs complete a separate survey form. The results of the surveys are used by VHA at the national level for planning purposes and included in VA’s annual EO13148 report to EPA. Overall results are tabulated and distributed to VACO, VISNs and VAMCs. Survey results can also be accessed on the VA Intranet at <http://vaww.va.gov/haig/Projects.htm#EnvCY04>.

VA Environmental Excellence Awards Program for Fiscal Year 2005 Accomplishments

Category of Award Nomination – Environmental Management Systems (EMS)

Title of Nomination – Healthcare Analysis and Information Group (HAIG) Environmental Survey

Note: The HAIG Environmental Survey for Calendar Year (CY) 2004 was developed in both FYs 2004 and 2005. It was conducted in FY 2005 with the survey report issued in May 2005. The survey report can be viewed at <http://vaww.va.gov/haig/Projects.htm#EnvCY04>. The HAIG Environmental Survey for CY 2005 was developed in FY 2005 and conducted in November and December 2005. It is anticipated that the report covering the 2005 HAIG Environmental Survey results will be available in the spring of 2006.

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Locations

- Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management located at VA Central Office.
- Office of Acquisition and Materiel Management (049) located at VA Central Office.
- Healthcare Analysis and Information Group (HAIG) located at VAMC Milwaukee.
- Center for Engineering & Occupational Safety and Health (CEOSH) located at VAMC St. Louis (Jefferson Barracks).
- VAMC Topeka located at Topeka, KS.
- Puget Sound HCS located at Seattle, WA.
- VISN 3 located at Albany, NY.

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Evaluation Criteria

Does the project involve the use of innovative approaches, techniques, and technologies? That is, does the project represent something that is not well demonstrated or proven for the category under which you are submitting your nomination?

Response: Federal agencies are required by Executive Order 13148 (Greening the Government Through Leadership in Environmental Management) to implement Environmental Management Systems (EMSs) at “appropriate” facilities. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has developed program policy and guidance, including “The Green Environmental Management System (GEMS) Guidebook,” to implement Environmental Management Systems (EMSs) at all VA Medical Centers (VAMCs). VAMCs are currently developing and implementing the GEMS. In addition to EMS, EO 13148 contains numerous other requirements related the management of environmental programs.

The HAIG Environmental Survey is designed to measure the progress that VAMCs are making in implementing GEMS and complying with other requirements of EO 13148. The survey consists of three parts – a survey of staff responsible for managing environmental programs at both the VAMC and VISN levels and a survey of VAMC senior level staff. Survey questions were developed by a Professional Advisory Group (PAG) consisting of HAIG staff and senior level VACO, VISN and VAMC staff having extensive experience in the management of environmental programs and the development and implementation of surveys related to healthcare.

As previously stated, the major purpose of the HAIG Environmental Survey is to assess the progress VAMCs are making in implementing GEMS. Put another way, the HAIG Environmental Survey serves to audit the progress that VAMCs are making in implementing GEMS. To the best of our knowledge, the number of federal agencies that have developed and actually used EMS auditing tools is relatively small. As such, VHA’s audit of the progress that VAMCs are making in the implementation of GEMS through the Environmental Survey is, by itself, a significant accomplishment. It is even more noteworthy that the 2004 HAIG Environmental Survey delivered meaningful results to assist VHA management in evaluating the status of its GEMS program and through the 2004 EO 13148 Report to EPA demonstrating the excellent progress that VA is making in implementing the requirements of EO 13148.

Through the HAIG Environmental Survey for CY 2004 we found that:

- In CY 2004, 50 percent of VAMCs named a GEMS Coordinator, 36 percent formed a GEMS Committee, and 22 percent developed GEMS mandatory awareness training for all employees.
- In CY 2004, of the VAMCs that formed a GEMS Committee, 76 percent had senior management representation on the committee.
- During CY 2002-2004, 22 percent of the VAMCs conducted a third party environmental compliance audit.
- In CY 2004, 20 percent of the VAMCs developed a GEMS policy and 69 percent established a process by which funds could be made available to affect corrective action through the GEMS program.

Is the project cost effective when considering life cycle costs? Describe actual cost savings, revenue generated, and costs avoided, including the means by which the foregoing was determined. Also, describe any other tangible benefits, such as improved health and safety or reduced waste.

Response: The cost of conducting the HAIG Environmental Survey was nominal and included the PAG's time to develop, implement and review the survey, VAMC and VISN staff time to complete the survey, travel and information technology resources to adapt the survey for completion via the Intranet. We believe the survey has allowed VHA to meet its obligation related to EO 13148 reporting for what we believe is a relatively small expenditure of resources.

We believe the real cost benefit of the HAIG Environmental Survey is future costs that will be avoided. Data gathered by the HAIG Environmental Survey will help VHA evaluate environmental program performance, as well as allow VHA to ensure a timelier implementation of GEMS at its facilities. The survey questions covering environmental violations will alert VHA to those areas of its environmental programs that need attention now to reduce the incidence of violations and accompanying fines. Knowing the status of GEMS implementation will also tell VHA where attention might be needed to more expeditiously implement GEMS at VAMCs. Noting that one of the major purposes of GEMS is to improve environmental compliance at VAMCs, accelerating the implementation of GEMS should result in improved environmental compliance at VAMCs and reduce the number and dollar value of fines imposed by regulatory agencies.

A very tangible benefit of the HAIG Environmental Survey is the increased attention that VAMC senior management has paid and continues to pay to environmental programs. This increased attention will result in improved environmental conditions at VAMCs, as well as reduce the likelihood of health problems associated with exposure to environmental contamination.

Does the project have an internal education or outreach component designed to promote the goals of your project at the facility or within VA or to promote partnerships with the local community, another Government agency, a non-Governmental agency, private industry, or other entity outside your facility? Please describe.

Response: The HAIG Environmental Survey is a component of the overall VHA GEMS program. While significant training was not needed for VISN and VAMC staff to complete the survey, significant training has been conducted to improve the management of GEMS and environmental programs at VAMCs. This will result in continued improvement to VAMC environmental programs.

A joint task group comprised of VA and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) environmental professionals developed a comprehensive training plan to improve VAMC GEMS. This training plan was one of the numerous collegial efforts resulting from the VHA and EPA partnership that began in 2002. A number of satellite TV training programs emerged from the training plan. Some of the courses developed to assist VISNs and VAMCs in implementing high quality GEMS include:

- "Environmental Compliance for Senior Management" (mandatory for all VAMC Associate Directors), 2004 and repeated in 2005.
- "GEMS for Senior Management" (mandatory for all VAMC Associate Directors), 2004.
- "EPA Compliance 101", 2005.

- “Resource Conservation and Recovery Act ((RCRA)”, 2004.
- “GEMS Implementation”, 2005.
- “CP Track Training”, 2005.

Were performance measures or goals identified to determine the success of the project? If so, describe them and indicate if they were met or exceeded.

Response:

We believe that there are at least two measures that demonstrate the success of the HAIG Environmental Survey.

The first performance measure that shows that the HAIG Environmental Survey is successful is the improvement in the management of VISN and VAMC GEMS and environmental programs shown over time. The Environmental Survey was first conducted for CY 2004. Data derived from this survey provided us a baseline to use in subsequent years to measure progress being made in GEMS implementation. We are almost done gathering data for the CY 2005 HAIG Environmental Survey and will be evaluating this data in the near future. Preliminary responses indicate that significant progress has been made in the implementation of GEMS in CY 2005.

The second performance measure that demonstrates the success of the HAIG Environmental Survey is the level of participation by VISNs and VAMCs. There was a remarkable 100% level of participation by VISN and VAMC environmental program managers, as well as 100% participation by VAMC senior management. The response to the 2005 HAIG Environmental Survey has also reached 100%. We believe that the high response rate to the HAIG Environmental Survey is an indication that VISNs and VAMCs enthusiastically support the VHA GEMS program.