



Jefferson County, Alabama



Profile

Jefferson County is Alabama's most populous county, with a population of 660,513, which represents 15% of state's total population. It is the principal center of finance, trade, manufacturing, transportation, health care and education in the State. Birmingham, the state's largest city, and 34 other municipalities are located within the County's 1,141 square miles.



Jefferson County Commissioners Mary Buckelew, Bettye Fine Collins, and Chris McNair offer comments at the EMS Kickoff.

The County Commission is the governing body of Jefferson County. The five Commissioners are elected from five districts within the County for four-year terms. The Commission employs over 4,000 individuals. The County Commission wishes to remain progressive by maintaining its planned balanced growth and providing an excellent quality of life for its residents.

Jefferson County is the home of six colleges and universities, four business schools and six junior colleges and trade schools with a combined enrollment of over 36,000. The County is a major center for health care and biomedical research. Altogether, 21 hospitals with a total of 6,400 beds are located in the County. Mercedes-Benz has a major manufacturing plant in the area and has attracted seven new businesses. In 1999, the American Honda Motor Company broke ground for their new \$400 million plant in Lincoln, Alabama (22 miles from the

Jefferson County line). Honda plans to produce 12,000 engines and an equal number of minivans or sport utility vehicles on an annual basis beginning in 2002. Our community's designation as being in marginal nonattainment for the 1-hour ozone standard is the major impediment to continued growth and economic development.

Fenceline

Jefferson County selected the General Services Department and Fleet Management as its fenceline. General Services consists of many divisions but our initiative will address the Crafts, Maintenance, Grounds, and Custodial divisions. Fleet Management deals, as one might expect, with the cars, trucks, and other vehicles constituting Jefferson County's rolling stock.

General Services and Fleet Management were selected over other County departments because of the variety of potential environmental impacts of the divisions and because of the enthusiastic support for EMS implementation from the Department of General Services Director, the leadership at Fleet Management, and the County Commission. Environmental impacts include energy consumption, resource recycling, air emissions, biodegradable materials disposal, pest control, purchase and disposal of hazardous materials.

The General Services Department divisions consist of 235 employees, and Fleet Management has 70. The General Services Department also supervises capital building projects and renovations via contractors

and subcontractors. The building capital improvement fund budgets for an 8-year period. Fiscal Year 1997-2004 will be approximately \$135,500,000.

The General Services Department manages the public buildings of the county including custodial services, air conditioning and heating, waste disposal, recycling, etc.

In an effort to engage the fenceline, the EMS process was given a “face” in the creation of Ecologic AI, an owl mascot urging employees to “thinkecological” – that is, to always remain aware of potential impacts their activities may be having on the broader community and our environment. AI and the thinkecological slogan adorn a number of premiums designed for the program, and an inflatable version of AI is used regularly at public events to help share the EMS message.



Fenceline employees from General Services listen intently to a presentation at an EMS sponsored chemical safety training.

Key Drivers for Adopting an EMS

Jefferson County identified **several critical factors that led to the decision to design and adopt an EMS** within the General Services and Fleet Management Departments. **Among these were:**

- ◆ A conviction that insurers and bonding agencies could reward the adoption of an EMS, acknowledging a safer work environment and reduced risk with better rates;
- ◆ The role of the EMS as a valuable marketing and public relations tool that would clearly demonstrate the County’s desire to hold itself to a very high standard of environmental conduct;
- ◆ Numerous regulatory benefits and the potential for improving employee participation in the facility’s environmental performance;
- ◆ Improve facility compliance with environmental regulations;
- ◆ The widening enthusiasm for the EMS concept among environmental management professionals;
- ◆ The high availability of government assistance programs to aid in EMS development; and
- ◆ The ability to partner environmental management with existing health and safety programs as an important factor in EMS adoption.

Objectives and Targets

Jefferson County recognizes two important and separate aspects of the EMS process relative to objectives and targets. First and foremost, the County wants to plainly demonstrate its commitment to obeying all laws and applicable guidelines relative to environmental matters. Handling things such as refrigerants, batteries, motor oil, and hazardous and medical waste have been carefully revisited and clarified.

The **County** perceives the EMS as **an opportunity to hold itself to a somewhat higher standard** and to set the example for the broader community. Consequently, **plans are being made to:**

- ◆ voluntarily reduce waste cardboard generation;
- ◆ evaluate a shift to soy based inks at the Print Shop;
- ◆ reduce water usage;
- ◆ improvements in conservation technologies in Jefferson County facilities, which will yield roughly
 - an 8% reduction in water use
 - an 8-12% reduction in electricity on an annual basis; and
- ◆ adopt other sustainable approaches to the delivery of government services.

Benefits of Adopting an EMS

Jefferson County has realized a number of benefits resulting from the adoption of an EMS in its General Services and Fleet Management Departments. As a result of adopting an EMS:



Environmental Protection employees Joy McDowell, Stacey Sims, and Mike Higginbotham do outreach about the EMS message at a public event along with Ecologic AI.

- ◆ **Jefferson County has seen an increased level of environmental awareness among employees** as a result of filling out impact/aspect forms and attending meetings with Team Leaders. In addition, through meetings with team members and employees we are getting more employee involvement.
- ◆ **Operating procedures that have been established are standardizing the flow of work, assuring that our activities are both efficient and as sensitive as possible to environmental concerns.** Additionally, as data is collected over the next several years, we anticipate a significant decrease in waste production, greater attention to resource management, and eventual cost savings.
- ◆ **Lastly, it must be noted that the EMS has opened opportunities for coordination with departments not currently in the fenceline.** Cooper Green Hospital, for example, has warmly embraced our efforts and included us in some of their promotional activities.

Costs

Internal labor--\$60,000. This represents the work our employees performed, in addition to their regular duties, to develop and implement the EMS (It contains no overtime). This is the time for our core team and implementation team members, and does not include various training and information sessions attended by our shop floor employees.

We plan to pursue **ISO 14001 Registration** by summer 2002. Based on the costs incurred by other local governments we estimate the registration process will cost us **\$10,000**.

Promotional materials--\$7,500. This is for various items such as shirts, caps, posters, and brochures promoting the EMS to our employees and other stakeholders.

Next Steps in Sharing the EMS Success Story

It is anticipated that the EMS will be in place by summer of 2002, and Jefferson County will then be poised to pursue ISO 14001 certification. Ongoing self-evaluation and goal setting will assure a steady movement towards our commitment to continual improvement.

Additionally, Jefferson County intentionally started small and with the most enthusiastic participants to achieve early success as well as learn the process. More long term, it is believed that Jefferson County will expand its program to include other departments into the fenceline who will be attracted by the financial and resource savings, the improved morale, and the safer work environments an EMS has to offer.