

Integrated Environmental Health & Safety Operations

Thomas L. Jacobson

Paul Burress

Laymon Gray

Florida State University

Environmental Health & Safety

1021 Atomic Way

1200 Carothers

Tallahassee, Florida 32306-4481

Abstract

The Florida State University continues to grow in enrollment and research and the demand for Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) support services must grow proportionally. To ensure the demands associated with this expansion are addressed, a number of strategic operational changes have been implemented. The most productive change has been the integration of many departmental operations to take advantage of the varied technical skills more efficiently. This concept has been instrumental in increasing departmental activities and capabilities, such as laboratory audits, workplace inspections, and training. Using this integrated operational approach, EH&S has continued to meet the challenges of campus growth while maintaining a high degree of safety and service.

Introduction of Organization

Florida State University (FSU) is a comprehensive, national graduate research university with over 40,000 students and 10,000 employees. There are 16 schools and colleges offering over 300 undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, professional and specialist degree programs, including medicine and law. FSU has generated more than \$190 million in external grant support in the fiscal year ending June 2006. Its library holdings rank among the top 30 public universities in the United States based on 2003-04 data.

The Department of Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) is located within the Division of Finance and Administration and supports the entire University Community. The Department is comprised of the following specialty areas: biological safety, building code, chemical safety, emergency management, fire safety, industrial hygiene, insurance/risk management, laboratory safety, training management, and radiation safety. The Department consists of 35 full time staff positions including administrative support. Historically, EH&S sections were spread out over as many as 5 separate locations concurrently. At present, the majority of the Department is located centrally on campus and future plans are to house all members of the Department in one common location.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

FSU has been undergoing significant growth in all areas for many years. Enrollment has increased steadily at a rate of approximately 2% per year. Enrollment caps have been pursued, although unsuccessfully, to allow additional campus infrastructure development to support this sustained growth without reductions in the levels of services provided. In

late 2004, our a new College of Medical building opened, bringing on-line a 300,000 square foot facility, which also included a 100,000 square foot research wing housing up to 60 additional medical research groups. In the spring of 2007 a new classroom facility was opened which is the first facility on campus dedicated solely to classroom space. Current campus construction projects include additional research facilities with over 300,000 square feet dedicated to research. Beyond the significant impact due to the growth in research, FSU has been expanding its' academic programs along with research and has hired many new faculty members. The University is currently working on a program to enhance interdisciplinary collaborations with plans to hire 200 more full time faculty members.

With the campus climate set, there are also external pressures that influence and direct operations such as many of those in EH&S. Regulatory requirements are still very important, new initiatives are continually being identified, and existing needs still remain. For example, EH&S coordinates all controlled substances on campus through license, purchase, and audit operations. Also, some fundamental impacts have been experienced in response to events of the past years (i.e. September 11, 2001, hurricanes of 2005 & 2006, and Virginia Tech) that have necessitated more immediate responses. Because of these factors and influences, it is expected that EH&S will continue to see significant increases for support services demands to be provided to the University community.

Design

To address the expanding needs of the University, without sacrificing existing services, two options were considered: expand or be more creative. As with most organizations,

expansion takes monetary investment and requires time. With the recent fiscal climate in Florida, expansion was not an option, without requiring too great a period of time, leaving more creative solutions as the primary response to these problems.

The first step in developing creative solutions is to understand the *status quo* along with the problems or needs. The second step is to identify potential options to address those problems or needs and develop solutions to achieve the desired outcomes. For EH&S there were several areas of interest. Fundamentally, all of the potential solutions involve integration of activities coupled with improved communications. In most cases, internal processes were evaluated to identify opportunities for integration, including cross-training between the specialized EH&S sections. Opportunities to integrate with other departments within the University were also identified. The final step was to enhance EH&S internal communications to improve performance, efficiency and effectiveness through better exchanges of information and cross-training.

Implementation

One of the first and most successful areas was in the area of laboratory and workplace inspections. For this activity, different functional areas within EH&S frequently work as an integrated team to provide value added service to our University customers. For example, members from the Biological, Chemical, Laboratory, and Radiation Safety sections perform formal semi-annual laboratory inspections under a unified program designed to match individual team member expertise with the actual hazards present within each facility. This is a departure from the previous and more common approach taken at many other institutions where these groups function more independently of each

other, sometimes even reporting to different administrators. Within our structure, Industrial Hygiene, Fire Safety, and Building Code are always easily accessible for consultation or intervention as necessary to alleviate unsafe conditions as they are identified. This joint approach produces additional benefits by improving the quality of our inspections, increasing appreciation for the expertise of our colleagues, reinforcing the pride in professionalism, amplifying future resources by providing cross-training, and subsequently bolstering morale within our Department and the relationships with our customers.

Another area utilizing an integrated approach is the training provided to our University community members. This is achievable because of the ready access and cross-training that routinely occurs between the different functional areas. Grouping related topical areas that are required for compliance with governmental regulations, related institutional policy, and best practice type content allows us to maximize impact while most efficiently using training resources and minimizing our attendee's time commitments. An example of this approach is delivering OSHA Bloodborne Pathogen, EPA Hazardous Waste Awareness, and Community Right-to-Know training into a single session tailored to the needs of the work environment for specific groups such as Grounds and Building Services personnel.

We also work with this approach in areas such as asbestos abatement and other hazardous materials management activities. EH&S is more involved in setting up renovation or demolition projects than many other university EHS departments throughout the United

States. EH&S often conducts surveys in the planning stages, even working with project managers and architects to identify potential problems and advocate for inclusion of improved practices and features within project plans. Additionally, we pass along very detailed and specific instructions of what needs to be done based on an accumulated wealth of applicable institutional knowledge. Since EH&S provides internal support to the University, areas of concern can be rapidly delineated and sampled without having to sub-contract the work to an outside contractor resulting in significant time and cost savings.

The claims management section within the EH&S department is an example of an efficiently run program. This program is responsible for the management of all aspects of insurance claims. This requires established procedures that are easy to follow for FSU staff and other individuals. Another key element to this program's smooth operation is constant communication with employees, departments, claimants, and other state agencies to provide support during the claims process.

One other area of improvement that has helped integrate activities is in our information technology (IT). To help improve the ability to capture and use information, we have deployed a department wide intranet. The EH&S intranet has allowed us to coordinate activities, manage resource reservations, and foster better collaborations on shared programs and documents. This system is currently supporting all software applications for the Department. Having this internal IT management ability allows for better integration and access of databases across the entire EH&S.

Benefits

There are many benefits to more integrated operations. One of the most important is the development of a more cohesive department. This process of unifying more Departmental activities has led to increased cross-training and increased the level of mutual understanding and professional respect within EH&S. Individuals are improving knowledge in their respective technical areas and related aspects of other areas through internal training and via interactions with other specialty areas experts. This facilitates a continued high level of support for campus operations during this period of continued growth utilizing existing staff and budgetary resources. Departmental recognition on and off campus is also at an all time high.

Retrospect

At present the system seems to be working very well. Retrospectively, a more detailed plan could have been used, one that would have directed the actions, rather than a reflexive process, but the success to date is hard to question. Based on the success of the Department, EH&S will continue to look for other opportunities for integration, while continuing to build a process that will work during the University's continued growth.