

Alabama Environmental Management Commission
and Alabama Department of Environmental
Management

Unified Strategic Plan

1/2024

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I Purpose

This Unified Strategic Plan links the strategy for the AEMC (Commission) and the ADEM (Department). It is a unified, multi-year strategic plan to accomplish significant results in the fulfillment of both the Commission's and Department's mission as set out in the Code of Alabama, 1975, Section 22-22A-2.

II Mission, Values, Operating Guidelines

The joint **Mission** of the Commission and Department is to...

Assure for all citizens of the state a safe, healthful and productive environment.

Both the Department and Commission have identified the following **values** that are important to the fulfillment of their mission and which will **guide the operation** of the Commission and Department.

1. **Clear, Science-Based Decisions and Policies to Protect Human Health and the Environment** - *We seek clarity, consistency and certainty in our regulations, methods and actions, ensuring they are based on objective, peer-reviewed scientific standards and that they provide protection and fair treatment for all citizens.*
2. **Respect each other's Roles** - *We will respect the roles of the Commission as a body, the Department as an organization, with the Director as the Chief Executive Officer.*
3. **Seek Transparent Communication** - *We will seek open and transparent communication within the Commission, the Department, and between the Commission and Department.*
4. **Use Resources Wisely** - *We respect the wise, productive, and efficient use of resources, prioritizing actions to gain the greatest environmental return on the investment of our limited resources, and relying on innovation and efficiency to multiply the resources we have.*
5. **Act on Agreed upon Goals** – *The Commission will seek agreement on goals and plans to achieve the most meaningful results to effectively execute our mission, of assuring a safe, healthful and productive environment. The Commission will act on those goals and plans only when agreed upon.*

III Roles of the Commission and Department

In the fulfillment of its mission, the Commission and the Department have cooperative but different roles and responsibilities.

AEMC	ADEM
<p>The Commission's role is to set policy by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Promulgating rules, (2) Hearing appeals (3) Managing the Director of the Department. 	<p>The Department's role is to implement policy by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Providing timely quality information to the Commission to help them in policy setting decisions. (2) Developing science-based standards and managing permitting, compliance determinations, and enforcement actions in compliance with standards to implement the Commission's set policy.
<p>To fulfill its role, the Commission needs:</p> <p>Comprehensive, clear, and unbiased information for policy decision making.</p> <p>To convey any proposed new objectives, policies or initiatives to the Director.</p>	<p>To fulfill its role the Department needs:</p> <p>Clear direction from the AEMC</p> <p>Resources</p>
<p>The Commission depends on systems and procedures as follows:</p> <p>Defined processes to set policy, deal with emerging issues, adopt regulations, and interact with public.</p> <p>Defined processes to obtain comprehensive, clear, and unbiased information from the Department.</p> <p>Operating guidelines to enable open, efficient, and collaborative decision making.</p>	<p>The Department relies on systems and procedures as follows:</p> <p>Budget management to manage financial resources.</p> <p>Operations management to manage the permitting, compliance determination, and enforcement operations of the organization.</p> <p>Operational procedures to manage administrative functions, information system and personnel.</p> <p>Performance and Quality management to lead the Department's professionals to seek high levels of performance and quality.</p>

IV Vision for Achieving the Most Meaningful Results for the Environment

The Commission and Department share a joint vision to achieve the most meaningful results for a safe, healthful and productive environment. Areas of accomplishment include, but are not limited to the following:

- **Air Media** - the achievement of ambient air quality at or above standards set by EPA
- **Land Media** – the safe and responsible management and disposal of solid and hazardous wastes, the control, remediation, and redevelopment of contaminated soil and/or groundwater sites, and the diversion of recyclable materials from the solid waste disposal stream
- **Water Media** - the attainment of water quality standards and all use classifications and minimizing the effects of stormwater runoff(including utilization of State Revolving Fund Programs to improve infrastructure)

V Key Goals for AEMC/ADEM

- 1. Effective and Responsive Commission** - An effective and responsive commission is:
 - a. getting an open flow of information from all major stakeholders
 - b. collaborating within the Commission on decisions and reasons for them
 - c. setting and following operational guidelines that promote meaningful results
 - d. addressing issues in a timely manner
 - e. receiving comprehensive and unbiased information from the Department
- 2. High Performing Work Environment** - The AEMC and the ADEM need a work environment that promotes productivity and is fulfilling for the organization and its people. A reflection of a high performing work environment is:
 - a. adequate financial and physical resources to meet goals
 - b. develop resources for optimizing sustainability and innovation
 - c. high caliber personnel
 - d. high caliber data support systems
 - e. setting high standards of performance and accountability
 - f. the accomplishment of goals
 - g. a clear line-of-sight between our mission, goals, and strategies to accomplish goals and individual employee work activities
 - h. high employee morale
 - i. fair treatment of all
- 3. Credible Relationships with External Stakeholders** – Having a credible relationship with stakeholders (including residents, the regulated community, and all branches and levels of government) is:
 - a. engaging in proactive outreach
 - b. making relevant commitments and keeping those commitments
 - c. having an open, efficient flow of information to and from stakeholders about their expectations
 - d. treating stakeholders fairly
 - e. providing equal access and consideration for all parties/stakeholders

- f. provide technical and educational resources to communities in need
- g. demonstrating to stakeholders that resources are being used efficiently
- h. providing timely information
- i. providing technical support to the regulated community
- j. addressing climate issues in a manner consistent with state executive and legislative branches.

4. Efficient and Effective Departmental Operations – Efficient and effective operations is:

- a. implementing a robust quality management system
- b. managing program operations to specific key performance metrics
- c. effectively managing our operational budget and individual program budgets
- d. making decisions, including both regulatory assistance and administrative deterrence, to promote progress toward 100% compliance
- e. consistently achieving timeliness standards in our actions
- f. measuring environmental improvements over time
- g. plan and prepare personnel, organization structure, physical facilities, systems, and funding for the long term, and
- h. Team with relevant state and federal agencies and the Governor to address new environmental concerns and strategies.

VI Strategies to Achieve Mission, Vision, and Key Goals

There are factors that are critical to the success of efforts by the Commission and the Department to achieve their shared mission, vision, and goals. Those factors are reflected in following specific strategies which are implemented by the Commission and/or the Department:

A. Practice Effective Communication Between the Commission and the Department – Establish and promote practices to obtain comprehensive, clear, and unbiased information necessary to fulfill responsibilities.

Intent

- Provide quality timely information to the Commission for decision making
- Promote transparency in communication between the Commission and Department

Strategies

- i. **Information Gathering Process for the Commission** – Maintain a process for the Commission to obtain information from the Department and other sources necessary to make rulemaking and policy decisions.
- ii. **Communications** –To be effective, the Commission and the Department need transparent, effective and positive communication. Collaboration and joint decision making require effective communication among the Commissioners, and between the Commission and external stakeholders and the Department. Commissioners should avail themselves of opportunities to openly and clearly talk about issues, opportunities, and decisions and do so in compliance with the Open Meetings Act.
- iii. **Managing the Director** – A Representative of the AEMC, shall meet with the Director for a formal review of performance at least annually.

- B. Effectively address Emerging Issues, Regulations, and Interaction with the Public –**
Utilize processes to effectively deal with emerging issues, adopting regulations and interacting with the public.

Intent

Provide for efficient and effective Commission operations by...

- standardizing practices for critical Commission activities such as public comment at meetings, public input on director’s performance etc. and
- increasing and improving stakeholder involvement

Strategies

- i. **Emerging Issues –**
 - a. The Director will periodically update the Commission on emerging issues
 - b. and will investigate and report back to the Commission on any emerging issues identified by the Commission
 - c. team with state and federal partners to address new environmental concerns.
- ii. **Public Input –** Evaluate and improve, as necessary, the AEMC process for receiving input from stakeholders.
- iii. **Department Initiated Regulations –** Assure that the AEMC is informed on all issues related to Department initiated proposed regulations.

C. Departmental Support for AEMC – Provide robust departmental support to the AEMC.

Intent

- Provide the Commission with comprehensive, unbiased and clear information with which to make decisions.

Strategies

- i. **Information Support for Decision Making** – Maintain a structured format for efficiently providing support to the Commission to meet their information needs by having the Director:
 - a. Proactively inform Commission on current issues
 - b. Reactively respond to issues raised by Commission
 - c. Report to the Commission regarding stakeholder raised issues
 - d. Provide basis for Department proposed rules and Department input on non-Department proposed rules
- ii. **Department Performance Reporting** – Provide internal and external operational (program), financial and performance information to the Commission on a regular basis.

D. Goal Focus – Focus ADEM staff around department and program goals.

Intent

Implement a performance management system to...

- Hold staff accountable for individual performance
- Center employee rewards around high performance
- Focus management on program metrics
- Improve employee satisfaction/morale
- Create clarity and alignment (employee line-of-sight) on departmental goals
- Enhance internal communications about performance expectations
- Improve quality through continuous process improvement

Strategies

- i. **Mission** – Communicate and align all staff with the Department’s mission.
- ii. **Program Outputs and Performance Metrics** – Evaluate program and staff performance based on performance utilizing Departmental Operating Plan metrics, EPA grant commitments, and EPA State Review Framework audit elements.
- iii. **Performance Management** – Use performance metrics to communicate and reward high performance and to address and change poor performance.
- iv. **Staff Alignment** – Engage all staff in aligning work expectations with program goals. Gain staff input in setting program goals.
- v. **Celebrate Successes** – Identify key successes and find ways to celebrate them with employees, Commissioners and other involved stakeholders.

E. Quality Operations – Ensure that the Department is managing quality in operations.

Intent

Successfully manage the Department's operations by...

- Providing clarity and accountability for funding and resource allocation
- Create a clear picture of funding sufficiency
- Gain greater efficiency in operations
- More effectively meet customer needs and expectations
- Speed up the ability to accept and use new technologies
- Create clarity and accountability for operational performance
- Gain consistency across operations
- Develop a system that rewards employees for high performance
- Encourage and provide opportunities for employees to showcase capabilities
- Instill greater trust in the Department by the Commission, and external stakeholders

Strategies

- i. **Quality Assurance Measures** – Utilize agreed upon quality assurance measures, such as SOP's, within permitting, compliance evaluation, enforcement and other pertinent support processes and functions.
- ii. **Audit Quality Performance** – Audit quality assurance measures and performance.
- iii. **Evaluate Program Performance based on Output Metrics** - Identify primary program products and evaluate performance by the key metrics for those products.
- iv. **Budgeting and Permitting Cost Justification** – Maintain standard budgeting and permitting cost justification methods across all programs.
- v. **Support of Department** – Ensure Department financial, IT, personnel, laboratory, physical facilities and other resource support is adequate to successfully meet defined program requirements.
- vi. **Continuous Process Improvement** – Maintain a Department-wide continuous process improvement strategy.

F. Compliance – Implement operational changes, policy changes, and a multi-pronged approach to encourage 100% compliance among all regulated entities.

Intent

Encourage and support 100% compliance by...

- Reinforcing a normal expectation of compliance among all regulated sources
- Providing appropriate, measured, and focused compliance assistance where needed
- Assuring fair and consistent enforcement among all regulated entities
- Increasing the speed of compliance determinations and enforcement actions
- Providing departmental and commission focus on programs needing assistance with non-compliance rates
- Identifying and implementing solutions for achieving high compliance rates

Strategies

i. Remove internal Obstacles to Compliance:

- a. Program level operational changes to increase compliance
- b. Department level operational changes which are outside program's direct control to increase compliance
- c. Policy and related regulation changes that increase compliance

ii. Emphasize Multi-pronged Approach to Achieve Compliance:

- a. Inspections
- b. Informal enforcement, including technical assistance as a training opportunity
- c. Formal enforcement activity to include penalties and cease & desist orders
 - i. Graduated enforcement
 - ii. Informal enforcement when possible to conserve resources

VII Plan Adoption and Implementation

As set forth in Section 335-1-1.03 (4) through (6) of the ADEM Administrative Code the Unified Strategic Plan is to be adopted by the Commission. The Department will utilize the Unified Strategic Plan to guide its actions and will develop Departmental action plans consistent with the Unified Strategic Plan.

Agreement on Unified Strategic Plan – The Commission and the Department agree that the Unified Strategic Plan as set forth in this document represents the plan that will guide the actions of the Commission and the Department until a new plan is developed.

Annual Departmental Operating Plan – Execution of the Unified Strategic Plan will require the annual development and implementation of measurable actions coupled with a review of performance from the previous year. The identified measurable actions will be included in an Annual Departmental Operating Plan.

Day-to-Day Performance – The Unified Strategic Plan as well as Annual Departmental Operating Plans are intended to inform the Commission and guide the Department in the execution of the Department's mission.