

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 What Is CEM

Community Environmental Management or CEM is a multi-tiered initiative that uses a variety of educational, assessment, technical and planning tools to assist communities with addressing non-point source pollution and other related environmental issues. Addressing these issues involves changing the way communities think about, plan for and implement local programs/policies that impact natural resources and water quality. The group or individual facilitating a CEM initiative works to guide this change.

Many communities currently address environmental issues through a variety of plans including: open space, natural resource, flooding, transportation, water quality, comprehensive or master plans. But, there is often a lack of sound technical expertise on environmental issues available to communities when creating these plans. A CEM initiative can help fill in the gaps that often occur as part of a regular planning process. The impetus for creating CEM comes from various groups asking for guidance on how to impact this process. Every area being unique, CEM uses a flexible and locally led approach.

CEM is designed to work on a range of geographic scales such as site-specific, community, municipality or watershed. Municipal leaders, conservation boards, planners/planning boards, water quality committees or concerned landowners, can implement it. The overall objective is to establish effective local programs for addressing specific community concerns.

The basic structure of the CEM process is briefly as follows:

Tier 1 – Survey of Community Environmental Concerns (see page 51)

Identifies a community's current perception of their water quality and other natural resource problems. This is accomplished through a review of existing materials and a short worksheet and survey.

Tier 2A – Community Capacity Assessment (see page 74)

Provides a current overview of a community's ability to address their natural resource concerns. A worksheet identifies key decision-makers, existing local regulations, regulatory infrastructure, and current enforcement and maintenance capabilities.

Tier 2B – CEM Assessment Worksheets (see page 79)

Individual assessment worksheets are used to evaluate the existing level of risk from concerns identified in Tier 1. These worksheets further help a community evaluate the extent of existing environmental problems along with potential strategies and management options for addressing them.

Tier 3 – Community Natural Resource Planning (see page 345)

The remedial and preventive strategies and management options the community identifies for addressing each concern are then incorporated into individual plans or an overall 5 year natural resources plan for the community based on restoration and protection goals established for the assessment area.

The natural resources plan should then be incorporated into the Community's Comprehensive Land Use Plan to provide the documentation of the importance of these resources to the community. The Master Plan will provide the legal justification that the public welfare will be adequately protected by any regulations that might be adopted to protect and preserve these resources.

Tier 4 - Natural Resource Plan Implementation (under construction)

Components of the natural resources plan(s) are implemented with the overall objective being to establish effective local programs for addressing specific community concerns such as loss of farmland. This tier involves practices, development and adoption of ordinances or implementation of a local public outreach program.

Tier 5 – Feedback and Evaluation (under construction)

Tier V will provide guidance for ongoing evaluation of plan implementation to determine if goals are being met.

1.2 What Makes CEM Different

CEM focuses on local conservation efforts. Typically local planning efforts are focused on socio-economic concerns. Natural resources are often examined, but not in detail or they are sometimes seen as impediments to local progress. CEM attempts to shift our thinking from planning's impact on conservation to conservation's impact on planning.

CEM facilitates this shift by offering a wide range of strategies and management options for conservation at the local level. These strategies and options have been tested in diverse settings and are proven to be effective. Some communities may have already outlined these strategies and options as part of other initiatives, but lack the guidance and resources to properly implement them.

Working with a diverse group of partners, the CEM initiative attempts to streamline, manage and guide conservation efforts into effective local programs. None of the strategies and options recommended are new. CEM is simply a process. This process builds on the communities existing strengths and attempts to provide viable alternatives for addressing weaknesses and can improve connections to existing resources that are available to help.

1.3 Goals of the CEM Initiative

The goals developed through the CEM initiative will vary for each community. Many of the goals may be difficult to measure. Some goals will not have an immediate visible impact and many will only be reached at some point in the future. Although many of the goals may appear elusive, they are attainable and highly rewarding.

The goals of the CEM process are as follows:

- Local leaders will develop an increased understanding of why education and public outreach are important to conservation issues and practices.
- Key personnel and decision-makers involved in natural resource and water quality management will be identified and invited to participate in the CEM process.
- Local leaders will gain a more realistic evaluation of existing municipal and watershed conditions.
- Local leaders will be exposed to a variety of different strategies and management options that address conservation concerns.
- Existing sources of community assistance will be identified and exploited.
- Example conservation initiatives will be provided highlighting their structure and overall benefits.
- Conservation and natural resource plans will be developed that are tailored with specific municipal and watershed resources/issues in mind.
- Conservation and natural resource plans will be integrated with existing planning efforts to ensure their support and implementation.
- Local support for conservation initiatives will be increased.
- Municipalities or watersheds will benefit socially and environmentally from the implementation of effective and efficient local conservation programs.

1.4 How to Use This Guide

This guide has been written to assist CEM implementers to better understand the CEM process, local conditions and structures and how to impact change in their communities. There are two concepts to keep in mind when using this guide.

First, every area is unique with respect to environmental and social/political conditions. Understanding these conditions, even separately, is not an easy task. Understanding their inter-relationships is more confusing still. The process may be overwhelming at times. But, without this exploration, there can be no effective conservation programs at the local level. Many people around the world are struggling with this same issue. On the bright side, it appears that most people deeply and truly desire a clean, safe and comfortable

environment in which to live. We need to build on this support and find ways to environmentally, socially and politically make it happen.

Second, CEM can be used to impact these environmental and social/political conditions at many different scales. These scales are geographic, demographic and planning related. CEM initiatives can range from a single site to whole watersheds, from an individual to a multi-group consortium, from a single stand-alone plan to a watershed plan or master plan, and every combination in between. It is up to the CEM implementers to determine the size and scope of these scales. This will depend largely on local conditions and commitment, time restraints and available resources.

The organization and structure of CEM and this guide attempts to address these two key concepts. No guide can answer every question or take into account every possible situation that exists. We are relying on the fact that local people are best suited to make and implement local decisions. The flexibility and depth of information that CEM provides is a starting point. From that point forward, only local commitment and expertise can make the necessary changes for impacting the environmental initiatives covered under CEM and others.

1.5 How to Use the CEM Web Site

The CEM website found at <http://www.ecswcd.org/html/cem.html> contains CEM background information and worksheets. Anyone with Internet access can read, download and/or print out CEM materials quickly and easily. In the future we hope to provide a new and improved site with numerous links and additional materials about specific CEM strategies, management options and other agencies/programs that can aid with your efforts.