

ISO 14001 changes – a month on, how is it going?

On 15 September 2015, the new ISO 14001:2015 Environment Management Standard was published.

Long awaited and overdue for a revamp, the new Standard has seen many changes to make environment management a more company-wide approach than ever before.

The 2015 Standard still follows the risk-based approach of a Plan-Do-Check-Act system as most other ISO Standards. It now also incorporates a new 10-point framework called Annexe SL. The Annexe SL framework is a generic framework to go across all Management Systems as they are updated (such as the recently revamped ISO 9001 Standard). This will ensure there is consistent terminology and clause numbering across all Standards.

By ensuring all management systems are consistent in their framework, this will make life much easier if you are certified to more than one management standard. For example, if you have ISO 9001, 14001 and 50001 you won't need a complex cross-referencing chart to show where you've put each element!

There will also be commonly used terms and definitions to make it easier to implement and maintain multiple standards - meaning less red tape which allows you to get on with the business of your business.

What is the difference?

The framework may be better organised, but what about the changes to the actual standard?

For a start, the new 14001 is very clear your environmental management should be something which is at the heart of your organisation and leadership. From now on, it won't be enough to have a small CSR team looking after your 14001 system – you will need to 'walk the talk' and have the whole organisation subscribing. This means two things:

- First, your senior management will need to be intrinsically involved. They need to be at the forefront in setting the organisation's environmental objectives and targets, and ensuring there are responsible people who can carry this out. It won't be enough for the senior management team to hear back once a year in a review – they should have input all along the way.
- Second, more responsibilities for the environment management system need to be spread throughout the organisation. This is not a dichotomy! Again, what the new Standard is trying to achieve is ensuring everyone is 'walking the talk', and involved. It's not just a few people telling the majority

what to do; it is a collaborative effort to ensure the environmental targets, objectives and systems are understood throughout the entire organisation.

The Big Picture

Many articles and working groups have pointed out other advantages of the revised 14001, including helping businesses to integrate environmental management into the strategies of the organisation, and ensuring the leadership team motivates all employees towards the goals and objectives of the organisation.

Environmental management needs to be part of the core business processes and strategies, including making sure the whole life cycle of your product or service takes into account your environmental management. This doesn't mean you have to do a full life cycle assessment of each and every product or service in your company! Rather, this will require organisations to think about potential environmental changes on their business, rather than just the impacts they will have on the outside world.

Communication will be key, even more so than in the ISO 14001:2004 Standard. External communication won't just be about ensuring your environment policy is on your website – you will need to be more transparent in your external communications and include data on how you are faring within your system. There is also more emphasis on improving the environmental performance across your whole value chain, and how you communicate your requirements to them. Giving evidence of your communication during audits will be key – via meeting minutes, email updates, contractor controls, or any way you communicate to staff or suppliers.

Who's interested?

One of the biggest changes is around your interested parties. This doesn't just mean your staff, but anyone who has something to do with your business. The Government will have regulations to be met in some way. Shareholders will want to know what changes you are making to see the return on their investment. Neighbours can be an interested party – does your business have the potential to impact on their environment? Your supply chain is an interested party; the more you can get them more involved, the better you can smooth out your environmental requirements down the chain.

A more specialist 'interested party' crops up if you manage buildings. Don't forget your tenants will be an interested party, so do get them involved as you progress your ISO certification. The tenants may already have their own certifications, but by ensuring there is communication you can keep them in the loop and keep your 'interested parties' interested. Holding Environment Group meetings, sending out information on what you are doing and how it will help everyone in the building, and just keeping everyone up to date will ensure even those people not in your organisation will understand what you are trying to achieve.

Are all the changes realistic?

Will the changes become a reality in many organisations? In small companies, it is easy for everyone to be involved in making sure the business strategies are adhered to, including any environmental management associated with these strategies.

As a company becomes larger, however, is it realistic to expect all senior managers (and indeed all employees) to become champions for the company strategies? Senior managers are already busy with multiple responsibilities. How much will senior managers and leaders really buy into the changes to the new Standard with this additional demand placed on their time?

Currently, most organisations would state they find it difficult enough to ensure their employees recycle in the workplace. This can be due to many reasons – no training given, confusing bins, no convenient recycling points. When the new ISO 14001 is put into place in organisations, companies will then need to look at a much bigger picture, including their supply chains and future external changes. If something as seemingly simple as recycling isn't done properly, how do you get your employees to think about the environmental strategies across the board?

Training and communication will be at the heart of implementing your management system. Companies will need to ensure employees are on side and understand why the system has been implemented, rather than just imposed on them.

It's not just employees. Senior managers should be involved from the start to be fully engaged in the process. They should be asked their opinion – and how the company targets and objectives fit into the environmental management of their organisation. It should be about how ISO can benefit their business, and not just become one more compliance issue they need to deal with!

ISO 14001 has long been a great way for organisations to put systems into place to help them be more environmentally responsible and save money along the way. The challenge now will be to implement the new changes and make sure the whole of the organisation understands why you are doing this, and how they can help. It's a positive change to making companies more responsible – and making employees feel like they are part of the organisation and culture.

Going Forward

Many people are now confused about what to do. Will they need to change all of their systems and processes? Will this happen overnight? How will they communicate this to their organisation?

The good news is, if an organisation already has ISO 14001:2004, their current auditor should help to give them advice on what will happen from the auditor's point of view. They can give a guideline about time scales, what their audits will look like in future, etc.

You have until 2018 to change to the new Standard; that is three years from the new Standard being published. If your next re-certification is around that time, you can start the changes now and work towards re-certifying in the new Standard.

A gap analysis is a great first step to the transition. It will also allow you to make a project plan for the transition and get the right people involved at the right times. You can then show your transition through an audit trail, which will help your auditor during the surveillance audits.

If you haven't had an ISO 14001 certification before, now is a perfect opportunity to start! This is especially true if you have ISO 9001, which has also recently been updated to the Annex SL framework. By starting the ISO 14001 alongside your 9001 system, you can ensure they dovetail instead of clash.

Having an ISO 14001 environment management system will help you to save money by reducing your costs for energy, materials and waste management. It will help you enhance your reputation with customers, and could be what persuades a new customer to use you over your competition.

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