

# ISO14001:2004 – Explained

## The Origins of ISO14001

After the success of the ISO 9000 series of quality standards, the International Standards Organisation published a comprehensive set of standards for environmental management. This series of standards is designed to cover the whole area of environmental issues for organisations in the global marketplace.

Organisations of all kinds are increasingly concerned with minimising their impact on the environment. This concern is driven by a number of factors, including increasingly stringent legislation, the development of economic policies and other measures that foster environmental protection, and increased concern expressed by groups in the wider community about environmental matters and sustainable development.

ISO14001:2004 has been developed to provide organisations with a structure for their environmental management systems (EMS) which helps them achieve both environmental and economic goals. It also allows an organisation to seek third party certification of its EMS, which can be used to assure interested parties that an appropriate EMS is in place.

## What is Required

As with all standards, ISO14001 requires you to formally document certain areas of your business, in this case relating to your environmental policy and to keep evidence (records) that demonstrate you are operating according to the requirements of the standard.

The standard itself takes a risk assessment based approach to environmental management. To implement it you need to take the following steps:

### 1. Build an understanding of your environmental impacts and performance.

Ask questions like:

- What are our waste streams?
- What regulations and legal requirements do we have to meet?
- How much energy do we use?
- What environmental consideration is given to the design of our products and services and the purchasing of raw materials?
- What do our neighbours think of us?

### 2. Write a policy statement that communicates your environmental values to stakeholders.

You must deliver environmental performance consistent with this. To comply with the standard it needs to:

- Be appropriate to the scale, nature and environmental impact of your business
- Include a commitment to continual improvement and prevention of pollution
- Include a commitment to comply with any legal requirements or other commitments relating to the environment
- Provide a framework for setting and reviewing environmental objectives and targets

This policy statement needs to be communicated to anyone working for you or on your behalf, and in addition the standard requires it to be available to the public.

### 3. Conduct an environmental risk assessment to determine significant issues.

By performing a formal risk assessment that quantifies and ranks the environmental risks, it will be possible to prioritise them for action. This risk assessment should be documented.

### 4. Identify risk assessment areas for improvement.

The standard requires that you identify environmental impacts that can be improved, set objectives for improvement with quantifiable targets for that improvement and carry out periodic measurement and review to ensure you are meeting the goals set.

### 5. Implement management programs to achieve the objectives.

This is important if the objectives are complex as all staff involved will need to know what they should be doing to make the improvement happen, and when.

## 6. Monitor and measure.

All environmental impacts identified should be monitored, measured and reviewed periodically. The results of the reviews should be used to identify improvements to the management programs and other procedures within the management system with a fixed agenda set by the standard where senior management

To enable these tasks to be managed in a consistent way and as the standard requires, and to ensure the plan-do-check-act cycle is repeated over time, the standard requires that you have formal procedures in place to describe how you do the following:

- Identify those aspects of your business that may or do affect the environment, and what their impact is. This review must be documented and repeated on a regular basis.
- Identify any legal or other requirements which apply to your business and ensure these are complied with. Your evaluation of compliance must be repeated periodically and documented.
- Provide training for your staff on the environmental management system and the impact their role has on the environment.
- Communicate your environmental policy to staff, and respond to external requests for information relating to your environmental performance. You also need to decide whether you will publish information on your environmental impact, and document this decision.
- Control the revision level of documents which form the Environmental Management System. Also control all documents that provide evidence of compliance so they can be accessed in future.
- Exercise operational control of those parts of your business that have significant environmental impact.
- Identify and respond to potential emergency situations that may have an environmental impact.
- Monitor and measure your environmental impact, and the performance of your Environmental Management System.
- Deal with problems within the business which may have an environmental impact, including assessing the effectiveness of the actions taken.
- Plan and conduct periodic audits of your environmental management system and procedures.

Once the Environmental Management System is in place and has been in operation for long enough for evidence of its effectiveness to have accumulated, it is possible to submit the system for certification. This will involve engaging the services of a third party certification body who will send one of their auditors to review what you have done and confirm that it is operating in the way you have defined, and that it meets the requirements of the standard. If this audit is successful, then your business will be recommended for certification.

## What are the benefits?

There are many benefits to be gained from implementing an Environmental Management System and achieving third party certification. The most significant are:

- Demonstration of legal and regulatory compliance
- Demonstration to stakeholders of your commitment to the environment
- Demonstration of an innovative and forward thinking approach
- Increased access to new customers and business partners
- Better management of environmental risks, now and in the future
- Potential reduced public liability insurance costs
- Cost savings