

A Guide to the ISO 14001 Environmental Management Standard

Business Information Factsheet
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Introduction

The ISO 14000 Standard is part of a series of international environmental standards that provide a systematic approach for dealing with and managing environmental issues. ISO 14001 is seen as the cornerstone of the ISO 14000 series because it specifies a framework of control for an environmental management system (EMS). Currently, it is the only standard of the ISO 14000 series under which it is possible to be certified by an external certification body.

This factsheet explains what is involved in obtaining ISO 14001 certification. It explains how to go about setting up and monitoring an EMS. It outlines the steps to register for the standard and advises how to prepare for an assessment. It also gives information about costs and how to find a certification body.

What is ISO 14001 and who controls it?

ISO is the International Organization for Standardization - a worldwide federation of national standards organisations. Based in Switzerland, the ISO is the world's largest developer of International Standards, and consists of 162 member countries worldwide. ISO standards are usually reviewed on a five-year cycle.

ISO 14001 was introduced as a standard in 1996. It is based on the requirements for an EMS and covers the monitoring, control and management of activities that have a direct or indirect impact on the environment.

The purpose of ISO 14001 is to help organisations comply with the environmental management-related aspects of their production and output. Under the standard, business owners must assess the environmental impact of their activities, decide what properties and management of the organisation they need to change, work out how to do it and put their plans into action.

The wider ISO 14000 series is divided into a number of separate parts, many of which are guidance documents under the general heading of environmental management. It includes guidelines on aspects such as auditing and labelling.

What does ISO 14001 cover?

The focus of the Standard is the Environmental Management System (EMS), which is a management tool that helps a business control its impact on the environment. The EMS is a structured framework that involves establishing and implementing a system of procedures, practices and instructions, and allowing the business to be certified by a third party.

Establishing an EMS involves a number of key steps:

- Carrying out a detailed preparatory environmental review, which covers the past, present and future aspects of the firm's environmental impact over which it has control or influence.
- Developing an environmental policy and setting implementation targets. Considerations include the implications for training, communication and resources. Procedures and training schemes should be developed so staff understand the new systems and how they will be brought into operation.
- Committing to an environmental policy based on the review of current practices. The policy should be a statement of intentions and principles in relation to the environmental performance of the business, and should provide a framework for action. It should set objectives and targets and commit the business to environmental compliance. The policy should help change the management approach rather than simply being a tool to achieve certification. Depending on the size of the business, a member of staff should be appointed to lead a project team to implement the policy.
- Regularly reviewing the EMS to check that it remains fit for purpose. Proprietors and management of the business should set up a system to monitor its performance against targets. This type of audit can show how well the business is achieving its objectives, as well as helping the management team to understand the areas where the business is weak.
- Producing a manual that clearly outlines the firm's policy and individual responsibilities, plus emergency procedures, where relevant. This documentation enables everyone involved in the process to know what they need to do and how different aspects are connected to each other. There should also be a reference system so that staff can identify, locate, use and update relevant documentation that the manual does not include. These documents will be essential for the accreditation procedures of external auditors. However, they need not be paper-based and could be located on the firm's intranet, if there is one.

What are the advantages of implementing ISO 14001?

ISO 14001 can help a business to reduce waste and energy loss, as well as saving money. It can also help make sure the business complies with environmental legislation and reduces its environmental impact.

Additionally, attaining ISO 14001 can help a business to achieve:

- More effective operations and processes.
- Improved investment potential - investors may view poor or non-existent environmental management as a greater risk.
- Lower costs as a result of efficiency, for example, a reduction in material wastage and environmental clean-up costs.
- Increased competitiveness and access to markets that are environmentally sensitive.
- Compliance with current and future statutory and regulatory requirements.
- Improved health and safety performance.
- Reduced levels of energy and materials consumption.

- Reduced insurance costs.
- A more responsible and marketable image and reputation projected to customers and employees.

What are the disadvantages of obtaining ISO 14001 accredited certification?

Before deciding to go ahead with the certification process for ISO 14001, business proprietors and the management team should also consider the drawbacks, which are:

- Accredited certification can be expensive for a small business to obtain and maintain.
- It would be unusual to seek ISO 14001 certification without already having a documented quality management system (QMS) in place. ISO 9001 is the designated standard for a QMS, and ISO 14001 was designed to be compatible with it. Because of this, for many organisations, it is better to seek ISO 9001 before or at the same time as ISO 14001. See BIF 29, An Introduction to ISO 9000 Quality Management Standards, for further information.
- The timescale for obtaining certification can be long, and there are no shortcuts.
- All aspects of the system, not just the documentation, must be kept under review and updated as required.

What steps are required to achieve ISO 14001 accredited certification?

Steps that should be taken to achieve ISO 14001 certification include:

- Ensuring business proprietors and the management team fully understand the Standard and what it will mean for their business.
- Deciding whether to obtain outside help or conduct the whole procedure with internal staff and resources.
- Presenting the concept positively to motivate and involve staff.
- Setting up teams to design the EMS and document the necessary procedures.
- Preparing a project plan, including manuals, to ensure that all documented procedures meet the Standard's requirements. Once there is a plan, it can be used to determine the project goals, identify all responsibilities, include the necessary staff training and set up a project timeline.
- Setting up a steering team. The team must represent all the main process areas of the business, such as manufacturing, quality, administration, sales and marketing. It should include people with the experience and authority to make decisions and allocate the necessary resources. This team should monitor progress, resolve problems and co-ordinate the design of the EMS.
- Training staff on the implementation of ISO 14001 so they understand the requirements of their job function as it relates to meeting quality policies.

- Setting up task teams for each process to redesign procedures, if necessary, and document them once they meet the requirements of the Standard.
- Training the required number of staff to carry out internal monitoring. They will need the skills to prepare a monitoring plan, conduct procedural meetings, assess files and records, document findings, write the monitoring report and report results to management.

It is important to use the implemented system for a few months in order to fine-tune it and maintain records. During this period, it is vital to:

- Follow all documented procedures and work instructions.
- Make improvements to the process.
- Conduct internal monitoring.
- Hold regular management review meetings.
- Keep fully documented records for application and auditing procedures.
- Once the EMS is ready for audit, the appointed lead assessor will make arrangements for an independent auditor to conduct the formal assessment for certification. The auditor will look for evidence that the business fully complies with the requirements for ISO 14001. This will be found in the records that the EMS generates and should therefore ensure that the business follows strictly all the requirements of the Standard.
- Ensure that the system runs for sufficient time before the audit so that there are enough records for the auditor to review.

Following approval of the independent auditor's recommendation, registration will be formally recognised by the certification body's Approvals Board, and a certificate of conformity to the Standard will then be issued. Having achieved registration, it will need to be maintained, and the lead assessor will normally remain available to help with improvements and ensure that the business continues to meet the requirements of the Standard.

How to select an appropriate external certification body

Full information about registration and a list of accredited certification bodies can be obtained from the UK Accreditation Service (UKAS, www.ukas.com). However, there is no requirement for certification bodies to be UKAS-accredited, and some reputable certification bodies may have other forms of accreditation. See the 'Further information' section of this factsheet for details.

How much does it cost to achieve ISO 14001 accredited certification?

The total cost will vary according to the size and complexity of the business, whether it has a QMS in place already, and whether outside consultants are involved.

In all cases, it is important to find out about both consultant and accrediting auditor charges in advance: typically, they will depend on the number of audit or consultant days required, travel costs and administration fees, plus the actual certification fee, which varies depending on the turnover of the business.

Hints and tips

- If there is not already an effective QMS in place, business owners should consider establishing one before embarking on the ISO 14001 Standard.
- All staff should read the Standard and keep up to date with any changes, legislative developments and other issues.
- Firms should carry out a preparatory environmental review on business activities to use as a basis for working towards the Standard.
- All staff should be educated on the benefits of the EMS so that they are enthusiastic and committed to its implementation.
- The system is there to help the business and it should be flexible enough to cope with changes. Business processes and activities should not be restricted by over-complicated EMS procedures.

Further information

BIF 29 An Introduction to ISO 9000 Quality Management Standards

BIF 60 A Guide to the Environmental Protection Act 1990

BIF 100 An Introduction to Environmental Regulations

BIF 144 An Introduction to British, European and International Standards

Books

'ISO14001 Step by Step: A Practical Guide'

Naeem Sadiq and Asif Khan

2011

IT Governance

'ISO 14001 Environmental Systems Handbook'

Ken Whitelaw

2004

Butterworth-Heinemann

Useful contacts

UKAS (the UK Accreditation Service) is a national accreditation body that assesses (against internationally agreed standards) organisations that provide certification and inspection services.

Tel: (020) 8917 8400

Website: www.ukas.com

The BSI Group develops standards and provides testing services, training and information.

Tel: (020) 8996 9001

Website: www.bsigroup.com

The British Accreditation Bureau accredits people, services and organisations to ISO management standards, and designs and manages bespoke accreditation schemes.

Website: www.british-accreditation.co.uk

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