

ISO 14001 What Does the Future Hold?

A white paper on the impending changes to ISO 14001

Introduction

It is anticipated that at the beginning of 2015 there will be an updated version of the environmental management system standard, ISO 14001. This White Paper aims to describe the proposed changes to ISO 14001 (based on information available to the public at this stage) and the implications these changes will have on companies that have, or are thinking of having, the standard deployed in support of their environmental management system (whether this be as a separate system or as part of an integrated business management system).

This paper will offer a realistic identification of the changes and how they impact on environmental processes and systems.

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Background

As with all management system standards, ISO 14001 periodically goes through a comprehensive review process. The review process ensures that the standard continues to meet the needs and demands of interested parties for environmental management systems.

As part of that review the ISO Committee's internal balloting system process began in March and ended in early May 2013. The detail within this White Paper is based on what was publicly available in July 2013.

It is anticipated that the revised ISO 14001 standard will be released early 2015 and over the coming year we can expect the draft (DIS) and the final draft (FDIS), so there may still be a few changes along the way.

Once the FDIS version is released then updates will be made available soon after. Refer to www.lrqa.co.uk for articles concerning this amendment and www.lrqatraining.co.uk for related awareness sessions.

So, what is the purpose of this White Paper? Well it's simply an opportunity to start thinking about the changes that may lie ahead and consider what impact they may have on an organisation using an environmental management system to support their environmental policy.

The Changes

When comparing the current standard, the anticipated changes are significant than those made at the last review in 2004. The following describes the main differences found and how they may influence change within an environmental management system.

Structure of the Standard

As expected, the new ISO 14001 will be modelled around Annex SL of ISO/IEC Directives in order to enhance compatibility and alignment with other ISO management system standards. Essentially, Annex SL describes how management standards will be structured in the future and continues to be based upon the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) methodology – albeit in a slightly revised layout:

- 0 Introduction
- 1 Scope
- 2 Normative references
- 3 Terms and definitions
- 4 Context of the organisation
- 5 Leadership
- 6 Planning
- 7 Support
- 8 Operation
- 9 Performance evaluation
- 10 Improvement

As a result of the new standard being aligned with Annex SL, there has been a significant change to the structure of the clauses. Noticeable changes include:

- Context of the organisation: this includes an understanding of the organisation and its context, the needs and expectations of its interested parties in addition to the determination of the scope
- Leadership and commitment: Emphasises the role of top management and what is expected of them
- Competence and awareness emphasised
- Communication: separated into internal and external communication with greater detail on the external reporting

“The majority of companies implement ISO 14001 because it makes sound business sense. Many of our certification clients tell us it has made a real difference to the bottom line.”

Richard Crute-Morris, UK Head of Technical Management, LRQA

- Operation: includes an addition of value chain planning and control
- Improvement: provides detail on non-conformity and corrective action.

Other Significant Changes

- The Environmental Policy is to support environmental protection specific to the context of the organisation.

This broadens the current commitment to prevent pollution and allows (if not encourages), organisations to commit to sustainable development, climate change, sustainable resource use and the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems and any other relevant environmental issues.

- Environmental aspect identification and evaluation process to take a life-cycle perspective. This is not a life-cycle assessment but a means of getting organisations to think beyond areas where they have direct control.
- Environmental objectives shall be developed considering internal and external issues, and must be supported with programmes that have one or more performance indicators and are to be fully integrated into the organisations processes.
- Value chain planning and control introduces requirements to control or influence upstream and downstream processes. This includes those activities which are outsourced (e.g., transport, packaging and end-use/disposal) and the processes governing procurement of goods and services.

- Outsourced processes and the process related to the purchase of goods and services are to be controlled by evaluation criteria taking a life-cycle perspective and by specifying environmental requirements as appropriate. The results of the evaluation shall be considered as an input to design, development or change of its products and services.

Also the organisation may need to provide information about the environmental impact during the use and end of life treatment of the product or during delivery of the service.

- The status of compliance with applicable legal requirements and other voluntary obligations must be known.

Other items to note are the increased number of terms and definitions – new ones include:

- Requirement
- Effectiveness
- Risk
- Documented Information (replacing document and record definitions)
- Outsource
- Monitoring
- Measurement

Changes to Annex A

Annex A remains as information and guidance to assist with the interpretation of the clauses stated within the standard. Additional guidance appears for organisations in leadership and commitment, operation and continual improvement, in addition to slight revisions throughout for the clause requirements that are more familiar.

Conclusion

As the title of this White Paper asks: what does the future hold? Without doubt there are some big changes ahead and they will have an impact on the way we interpret and meet the requirements of ISO 14001. However, we must also recognise that the majority of the standard appears to be remaining the same.

Organisations may experience various challenges when making the changes but do remember that migration from the old to the new will normally be expected to be accomplished over a transitional period (the timeframe of which is yet to be determined).

So, as for the next steps – ensure that your organisation keeps aware of the changes and starts making plans to adapt in a systematic and proactive manner.

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