Guide to the requirements of ISO 14001:2015

A plain English guide to the
ISO 14001:2015 Environmental
Management System

Contents

The purpose of this guide

Many people new to management systems are under the impression that an ISO standard is a set of rules that dictates how an organisation should go about its business. That is not correct.

An ISO standard is the document which contains a set of requirements (with some occasional guidance) for the framework of your management system. It is not a set of procedures and targets - they are for you to establish in a way which is relevant to your organisation and the context in which you operate.

If you've never looked at an ISO standard before, it may appear daunting. That's a lot to do with the fact that a standard has to be written in a way that applies to all organisations of every size, in every sector, in every location around the world. So occasionally an ISO standard can seem vague, and sometimes lapse into jargon.

This guide looks at all the clauses and main sub clauses and describes them in plain English. You will also find practical advice on measures you might want to consider implementing in your organisation. You should read this document alongside the standard.

This guide doesn't go through the standard line by line. ISO standards sometimes artificially separate important topics but in the real world you won't find it works like that in your workplace. So, this guide takes a more holistic approach to minimise the need to jump back and forth.

This guide is not a substitute for the standard itself nor for the expert guidance of a professional, but it will help demystify some of the more difficult-to-grasp aspects of ISO 14001.

Introduction

You usually want to maximise everything to do with your organisation, like brand awareness, revenue and profits. But when it comes to the environment, you want to minimise your impact.

The reasons for wanting to do this are many and varied. There's now much greater social, political and regulatory pressure to do so. Customers are keen to work with suppliers that have sound environmental credentials.

Whatever your motivation, one of the best ways to achieve your environmental goals is with ISO 14001:2015 - the international standard for an Environmental Management System (EMS).

In a nutshell, an Environmental Management System certified to ISO 14001:2015 (usually just referred to as ISO 14001) can help your organisation identify, manage, monitor and control environmental issues to improve what's known as your 'environmental performance'. This is largely achieved through more efficient use of resources, reduced waste and compliance with regulations.

The implementation of a certified Environmental Management System (EMS) will not guarantee compliance with legislation nor give you immunity from prosecution. However, it does provide a framework for you to minimise the risks of breaches of legislation due to the better control of processes. Risk is further reduced as a result of the increased awareness and knowledge among employees that comes from implementing and maintaining the system.

ISO 14001 is good for the environment and good for your business.

Why do organisations get ISO 14001 certified?

- **Reduce environmental impact and protect the environment –** quantify, monitor and control the environmental impact of your operations including prevention of pollution and specific commitments relevant to your organisation

- **Cost savings –** through better energy management, efficient use of resources such as water and reduced waste

- **Legal compliance –** comply with regulations and avoid fines and sanctions against your business

- **Control suppliers –** ISO 14001 prevents your good work being undone by suppliers with poor environmental performance

- **Win more business –** certification is increasingly a requirement when bidding to win work with the public sector or larger corporations.

Structure of the ISO 14001 standard

High level structure

Since many organisations implement and maintain various management systems at the same time, ISO (the organisation which develops the standards) has revised and restructured many key standards over recent years so that they share common structures, terms and definitions.

The document that describes this high level structure is known as Annex SL. This makes life much easier when implementing and maintaining standards. Because there are common clauses, you can combine your management systems to create one 'Integrated Management System'. This introduces simplicity (especially when adding new standards) and saves you time, effort and money. ISO 14001:2015 benefits from Annex SL.

| Stage in the process	Clause
Plan	**1 Scope** **2 Normative references** **3 Terms and definitions** **4 Context of the organisation** 4.1 Understanding the organisation and its context 4.2 Understanding the needs and expectations of interested parties 4.3 Determining the scope of the environmental management system 4.4 Environmental management system **5 Leadership** 5.1 Leadership and commitment 5.2 Environmental policy 5.3 Organisational roles, responsibilities and authorities **6 Planning** 6.1 Actions to address risks and opportunities 6.2 Environmental objectives and planning to achieve them
Do	**7 Support** 7.1 Resources 7.2 Competence 7.3 Awareness 7.4 Communication 7.5 Documented information **8 Operation** 8.1 Operation planning and control 8.2 Emergency preparedness and response
Check	**9 Performance evaluation** 9.1 Monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation 9.2 Internal audit 9.3 Management review
Act	**10 Improvement** 10.1 Nonconformity and corrective action 10.2 Continual improvement

PDCA

PDCA (the Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle) is most closely associated with quality management. Yet it's at the heart of all ISO management systems.

It's also sometimes known as the Deming Cycle or the Shewart Cycle.

The premise is quite simple. You **plan** to do something, you **do** it, you **check** your results and then **act** to improve.

Then you begin on the loop again, thus ensuring continual improvement.

It's inherent to all management systems and the key to improving environmental performance. The graphic shows in more detail how each clause of ISO 14001 fits into the cycle, with the relevant clause number in brackets.
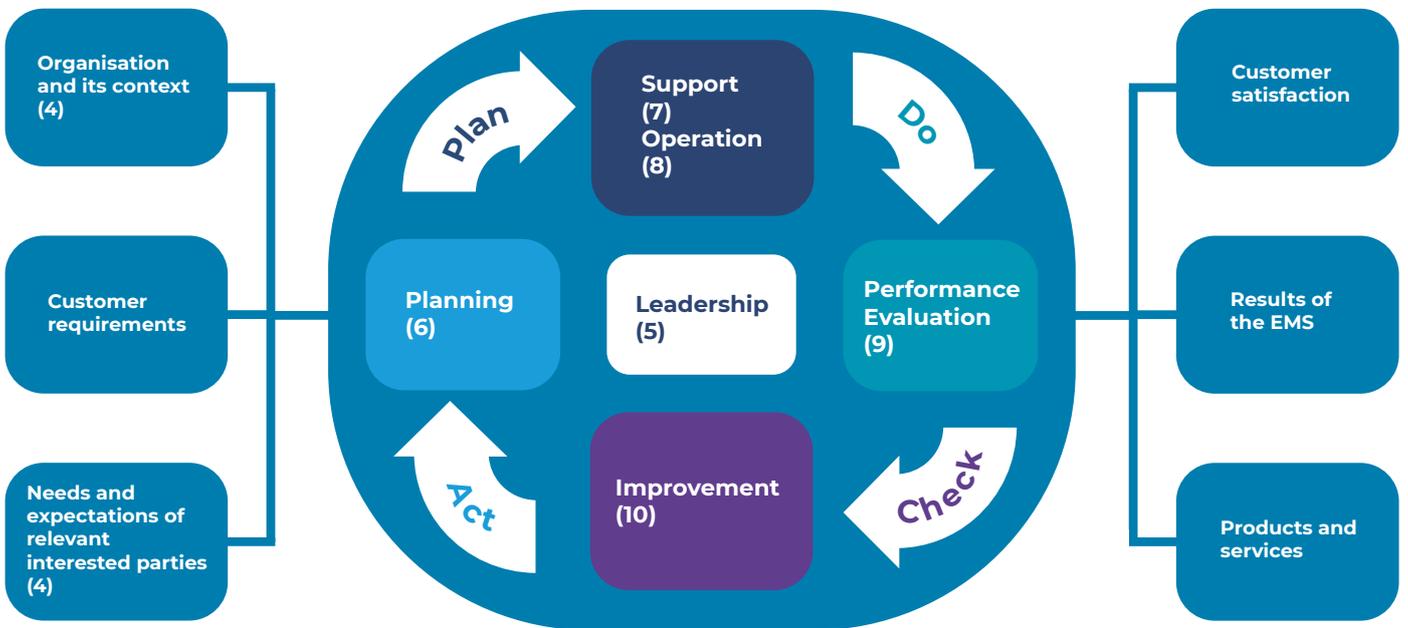
You will find the same high level structure in other standards such as ISO 9001:2015 (Quality Management), ISO 27001:2015 (Information Security) and ISO 45001:2018 (Occupational Health & Safety).

Requirements of the standard: Clauses 1 to 3

None of the first three clauses set out any requirements. However, you really should familiarise yourself with the terminology in Clause 3 as you'll get a bit lost when looking at later clauses if you don't have a basic understanding.

Clause 1 - Scope

This clause simply explains that the purpose of the standard is to set out the requirements of an environmental management system to improve environmental performance and its applicability to any organisation of whatever size in any sector.

Clause 2 - Normative references

This clause usually lists any additional documents referred to that form part of the standard itself. There are none for ISO 14001.

Clause 3 - Terms and definitions

There are many terms and definitions given in the standard, many of which are self-explanatory. Most of them are common to all of the major ISO standards. However, there are a few which are worth highlighting here that are used throughout the standard and more generally with reference to environmental management.

Environment

This does not relate to the 'business environment' in which you operate. It refers to the actual physical surroundings in which you operate including: air, water, land, natural resources, flora, fauna, humans and the interrelationships between all those.

Environmental aspect

This curious term relates to an organisation's activities, products and services that can interact with the environment. So, for example, it could be pollutants released into the air, or hazardous waste you dispose of. The standard also refers to 'significant' environmental aspects. Generally, you can consider an impact is 'significant' if there are legal environmental requirements relating to it.

Environmental impact

The *impact* is the outcome of an *aspect*. For example, emissions to the air (the aspect) may result in warming (the impact). You may consider 'aspect and impact' to be the equivalent of 'cause and effect'.

Environmental performance

Your environmental management system should ensure that your impacts are measurable. Once you can monitor everything, you are better placed to apply controls to reduce your environmental impact, such as reduced emissions and waste.

Environmental policy

This is a formal statement from top management of your intentions relating to your environmental performance. It's normally in writing, brief and outlines your commitment to complying with regulations and aiming for continual improvement.

Environmental management system

This is the set of policies, procedures, plans and actions in their entirety that you use to manage environmental aspects, fulfil compliance obligations and address risks and opportunities - and much more. In essence, it's everything that you do in order to achieve ISO 14001 certification.

Life cycle

This relates to consecutive and interlinked stages of a product or service system, from the beginning to end. This includes raw materials, design, production, transportation, use, end-of-life treatment and disposal.
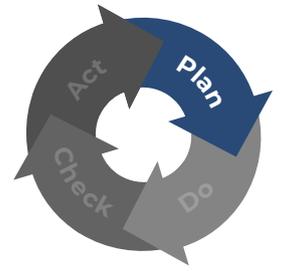
Requirements of the standard: Clause 4

4 Context of the organisation

Clause 4, like the previous 3, doesn't really set out any requirements but it is essential to pay close attention because it sets the parameters for everything that follows.

4.1 Understanding the organisation and its context

In essence, you are required to take a step back and look at the entirety of your organisation and the context in which you operate - and that includes both the business environment and natural environment.

Many organisations start this exercise by performing one or both of the following:

SWOT analysis

In trying to understand the context of your organisation, you should consider the internal and external issues that impact upon your organisation and your EMS. These can be categorised as STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES and THREATS. Simply use these words as headings and populate the lists beneath them.

PESTLE analysis

This established tool is particularly useful when developing an EMS. This exercise involves identifying the POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, TECHNOLOGICAL, LEGAL and ENVIRONMENTAL issues that impact upon your organisation.

You can do all of this by brainstorming with your colleagues across all departments and through interviews, questionnaires, surveys and even independent research involving all interested parties (see 4.2).

The general idea is that you need to consider how your organisation fits in with the world at large and how it impacts on both the environment and everyone with an interest in your organisation - sometimes known as *stakeholders* or, in the language of ISO 14001 - *interested parties*.

Note - at this stage, you aren't coming up with solutions to the challenges - that comes later.

4.2 Understanding the needs and expectations of interested parties

Interested parties are any persons or groups concerned with or affected by your organisation's environmental performance. For example, it could be the Environment Agency who is interested in emissions and waste, your shareholders who are interested in profits and your neighbours who are unhappy with the noise from lorries unloading at the crack of dawn. You may want to involve interested parties in your SWOT and PESTLE analyses.

You should, for each interested party, identify what their **needs and expectations** are. You will possibly then see that some are conflicting.

Within this exercise you must consider your **compliance obligations**. In other words, the laws and regulations which you must abide by. The chances are that you're already aware of these obligations - if not, you should seek the advice of specialist consultants for your industry sector. Of course, this applies whether you're seeking to implement ISO 14001 or not to ensure you stay on the right side of the law.

4.3 Determining the scope of the environmental management system

Once you have completed the above exercises you can determine the **scope of the environmental management system.** This is important because when you get your certificate, it will say on it what the 'scope' of your certification is, in other words, the parts of your organisation (such as design, production, distribution) and physical locations to which the certification applies. For example, if you're in the business of metal fabrication with sites across the country, you cannot get a certificate for the HR function at your head office and claim it applies to the entire organisation. A UKAS accredited certification body will be able to advise on the scope with no charge.

4.4 Environmental management system

From the above exercises, you then get to the heart of the matter which is to develop your **Environmental Management System (EMS)**. This clause simply states that you need to develop one, based on what you've learned from the steps above, and that you need to continually improve it. The rest of this guide will deal with how that's achieved.

Regulatory Bodies are principally:

Environment Agency (England)

Natural Resources Wales

Scottish Environmental Protection Agency

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Northern Ireland)

HSE also enforces some environmental legislation

Requirements of the standard: Clause 5

5 Leadership

Without effective leadership from the very top, your EMS is doomed to fail. Not only do you need buy-in and support from the most senior people in the organisation to get this project off the ground, but 'top management' will need to demonstrate in an audit that they genuinely are committed!

5.1 Leadership and commitment

'Top management' is a term that's used in ISO standards and refers to the group of people who direct and control an organisation at the highest level. It's likely to include, but not be limited to, people with Director, Head and Chief in their job titles.

Top management therefore needs to demonstrate their **leadership and commitment.** It's not good enough just to *say* you are committed - there needs to be real evidence. This could include, for example:

- Ensuring that resources are available to develop, implement and maintain the EMS e.g. dedicated staff; staff with the EMS as part of their responsibilities; freeing up time to review and audit systems and providing budget to support it.

- Providing evidence that the EMS and environmental concerns are part of the process of developing the business plan and strategy. Minutes from meetings may be used as evidence of this.

- Demonstrating that these issues are communicated to staff, for example on induction, at team briefings, through formal training (and allocation of a training budget), references to it in the Staff Handbook etc.

5.2 Environmental policy

Signing the **Environmental Policy** (see also definition in Clause 3) is essential. This has to be documented. This policy is often quite brief, only a page or so. It sets out the broad high level aims and should refer to your commitment to compliance with legislation, protection of the environment and continual improvement. The policy doesn't set the measurable targets - it simply makes clear that you are committed.

Just enter 'environmental policy' into any search engine and it will return many examples from organisations to give you an idea of what one looks like. But remember - it has to be *your* policy, in the context of *your* organisation. You won't get away with a cut and paste job!

The reason you can see so many of these online is that it needs to be available to all interested parties. So, put it on your noticeboards and on *your* website as a minimum.

5.3 Organisational roles, responsibilities and authorities

Whilst top management takes ultimate responsibility for the EMS, they also need to identify and assign other employees' **roles, responsibilities and authorities.** In a smaller organisation, it may be that top management takes on these roles, but in larger organisations it's more likely that other staff take responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the EMS. It should be made very clear, and understood by all employees (so therefore, documented) exactly who is responsible for:

- Ensuring that the system conforms with ISO 14001

- Reporting on the performance of the EMS to top management

Requirements of the standard: Clause 6

6 Planning

This is one of the biggest sections of the standard and arguably the most important. You need to get your planning right otherwise you'll set off in the wrong direction and waste time and money.

If you look at this clause in the standard, you'll notice there's a lot of jumping back and forth. Here, we're going to look at it in a holistic way.

Broadly speaking, this is where you start to focus on the details of your management system as it relates to the environment. It's very much about establishing the relationship between your organisation and the environment, identifying legal requirements that relate to your activities, then defining your objectives and targets - all the while being mindful of the need to seek continual improvement.

6.1 Actions to address risks and opportunities

This clause is in two main parts with the first focusing on actions to **address risks and opportunities**. Here, you start making use of all the information you gathered in Clause 4 when you developed your understanding of the context of your organisation.

The standard says that you must develop processes that address the issues identified. This could include procedures and written work instructions. (Remember, you don't need to document every last detail, but you need to exercise judgement and ensure the level of documentation allows you to exercise proper control.)

An established technique for addressing risks and opportunities involves a basic risk assessment approach and drawing up an Environmental Aspects & Impacts Register. (Refer back to Clause 3 - Terms and Definitions to remind yourself of the meanings of these phrases.) You need to include all **environmental aspects** (6.1.2) of your activities, products and services that you can control and influence, and their associated environmental impacts, from a life cycle perspective (again, look at the Terms and Definitions). Consideration should be given to any abnormal and reasonably foreseeable emergency situations. Here's a simplified example of a register:

Activity	Environmental Aspect	Environmental Impact	Risk Level	Impact Level	Responsibility
Operation of boiler	Emission of SO2, N2O, CO2	Pollution of air, global warming	Moderate	Moderate	Production Supervisor
Manufacturing of product	Use of water	Depletion of natural resource	High	Low	Production Manager
Construction during heavy rain	Discharge of soil and gravel to water	Pollution of water	High	Low	Site Manager

You will note that the register also incorporates other items that are required by the standard to identify the level of risk (that is, the likelihood of it happening), the severity and whether or not an emergency plan is in place. You should, of course, have documented emergency plans in these situations. We'll cover that later.

Indeed, you will probably want to add much more detail to the register. For example, you may want to include details of frequency of testing, impact on the business, the emergency actions to take etc. It could very easily become a large and unwieldy document, so you may wish to consider using software dedicated to this task.

You must also identify your **compliance obligations** (6.1.3) and the register is a good place to record these as it then makes the link between your aspects, impacts and legal requirements.

For those significant environmental aspects that you have identified, you need to take **planning action** (6.1.4) to address them and ensure compliance. You should also develop actions to meet the opportunities you have identified - this is, of course, critical for continual improvement.

Underpinning everything in Clause 6 is the need to be able to demonstrate that you are actually in **control of your environmental aspects and impacts.** This is not explicitly covered in the standard but is integral to the concept of **continual improvement** and the Plan-Do-Check-Act principle.

What you can see in this section is that you aren't really being asked to do anything different to what you would normally do as part of a thorough business planning process - it's just that the focus of your attention is on environmental issues, rather than, for example, sales.

6.2 Environmental objectives and planning to achieve them

The second major part of Clause 6 is quite easy to understand. Setting objectives should be something that comes naturally to you when running an organisation.

You might think that setting goals should come earlier on, but you can't really set your **environmental objectives** (6.2.1) until you've got a grasp of all the facts. This section is less about meeting your legal obligations and managing risk and more about setting your own targets for continual improvement and then **planning actions to achieve environmental objectives** (6.2.2).

You can't just come up with any old easy-to-achieve objectives. They must be **consistent with your environmental policy** (6.2.1a), since all parts of your EMS should be interlinked. The tried and tested approach is to use SMART objectives:

• **S**pecific

• **M**easurable

• **A**chievable

• **R**ealistic

• **T**imebound

You must also show how they relate to your compliance obligations, how you are going to monitor them and what you are actually going to do to achieve your objectives. For this, you need to identify who will be responsible, what resources they will have at their disposal, what your deadlines are and how you will analyse the results. Just as you would with any other business objective.

Gap Analysis

Although ISO 14001 doesn't refer to a **Gap Analysis**, and it isn't an actual requirement, it can be useful, particularly for smaller companies that don't have someone dedicated to operating the EMS. It's good for helping you to identify where to start when you set out on your ISO 14001 journey - you may be surprised to find out just how much you are doing already, without realising!

You don't need to write an essay on all of this but you should keep it documented, otherwise, how will you be able to demonstrate to the auditor that you are exercising control? You could do it in a simple table based on something like the one below, or use some software to do it:

	Objective	Methods	Responsibility	Target Date	Compliance Requirement	Aspect Reference
1	Reduce energy consumption	Exchange lighting for energy efficient alternative. Install motion sensors. Monitor utility usage before and after.	Ops manager	End of October 2020	ESOS regulations Streamlined Energy & Carbon Reporting Regulations 2019 Energy Act 2013	ref EA001
2	Replace vehicle fleet with more efficient models	Review current fleet. Assess current mileage and emissions indicators to assess suitable replacements.	Fleet Manager	End of March 2021	Environmental Protection Act 1990 Finance Act 2000 Road Vehicle (Construction & Use) Regs 1986	ref EA002
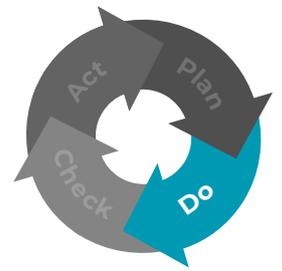
Requirements of the standard: Clause 7

7 Support

This clause relates to the actual things you do to make your EMS work. You need to make sure you provide the resources required, that staff are up to the task and that everyone's aware of your policy and what their role is.

7.1 Resources

The **resources** referred to could include human resources, infrastructure, technology and financial support. This could be everything from allocating a couple of hours' time from a colleague to audit systems right up to constructing an entire drainage system. It all depends on your organisation.

7.2 Competence

Anyone involved in doing work that affects your environmental performance must be **competent** enough to help you achieve your environmental objectives. You therefore need to firstly establish what level of competence is required so that you can recruit or train staff accordingly. You may want to perform a training needs analysis and develop a skills matrix to identify gaps. Once the gaps have been identified, you must address them. You should keep documented records of all this, possibly in personnel files. If you outsource work, the same requirements for competence apply to the contractors.

7.3 Awareness

All personnel involved in any activities that impact on your environmental performance must have appropriate **awareness** of the environmental policy and the environmental aspects and impacts associated with their work. You don't want to turn this into a negative experience so you should also ensure they know how they can make a positive impact, although of course they need to have the appropriate resources and competence as outlined in 7.2.

That said, failure is not acceptable. You may wish to set targets for individuals and include them in performance reviews as you would for any other aspect of their work. This demonstrates as much as anything to an auditor that your EMS is an integral part of your business.

7.4 Communication

You can only raise awareness with effective **communication.** This is something of an old chestnut in the workplace, with the topic regularly topping the list of things in the workplace that colleagues are dissatisfied with. So make full use of all channels such as the staff handbook, noticeboards, intranet, email reminders, team briefings etc. The auditors will be looking out for this.

Moreover, in the case of an EMS, you also need to communicate not just internally to colleagues but also externally if it's required for you to remain legally compliant (for example, reporting to official bodies and regulators). So prepare a timetable of what needs communicating to whom and when and ensure you stick to it.

By the way, don't forget that you also need to communicate with contractors to whom you outsource any work.

7.5 Documented information

The final sections of this clause focuses on **documented information.** Whilst you will need an EMS manual, which shows how you are compliant with all the clauses, this clause extends to more than that. Documented information is important for two key reasons:

• To provide you with the data and information you need to enable you to run your EMS properly

• To provide evidence to an auditor that you are complying with the ISO 14001 standard

Take a look at the standard here because it's quite clear on the requirements and there's little room for misinterpretation. But there are a few points worth making.

First, while documented records can be on any type of media - not just paper or electronic files on your computer - they need to be readily **traceable**, identifiable and controlled, for example with a date, author and/or reference number.

Second, records must also be easily **retrievable** and securely stored (perhaps with a password where appropriate).

Finally, they should be clearly **understood** by those who play a part in the management system. So use plain English!

Organisations often wonder about the extent and depth of documented information required. Clause 8 deals with this topic too. In fact, even without an EMS, you probably already keep a lot more information than you realise. Overall, the level of documentation needs to be 'proportionate' to your organisation. Much will depend on the nature of your business, but you must as a minimum:

• Show you are compliant where required

• Have the necessary records to be able to improve your environmental performance

• Have procedures to allow you to exercise control over significant environmental aspects and impacts (not necessarily all aspects) (see also 8.2).

However, you will inevitably need more than this. This is where the advice of an ISO 14001 consultant can be invaluable.
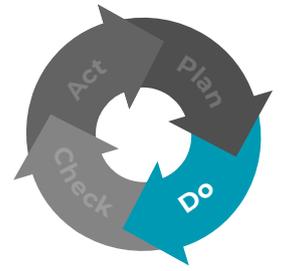
Requirements of the standard: Clause 8

8 Operation

For your EMS to actually work in a way that allows you to control your environmental aspects and risks, you need to define how you're going to control your processes - and implement those actions.

You need to set about this with reference to Clause 6. While that clause relates to planning the actions to deal with the detailed aspects and risks, Clause 8 is about determining exactly what you're going to do and actually implementing processes.

You also need to be mindful of the life cycle perspective, that is, exercising control over everything from the raw material/design stage through to the final disposal of the product/service.

8.1 Operational planning and control

The first part of this clause requires you to determine how you're going to exercise control over operations. You will undoubtedly have written procedures in many cases, but you will also need to consider these 'in the round', for example, also looking at broader management issues such as purchasing policy and training.

You need to keep your eye on the bigger picture: your operational controls are to prevent deviation from the environmental policy and objectives, and to ensure you meet your compliance obligations.

8.2 Emergency preparedness and response

The second part of the clause says you must have appropriate procedures for emergency responses to deal with risks that could result in a significant impact on the environment. You also need to test, review and revise these procedures periodically and ensure everyone is trained to deal with emergency situations.

Remember, you also need to be able to apply similar control over outsourced activities.
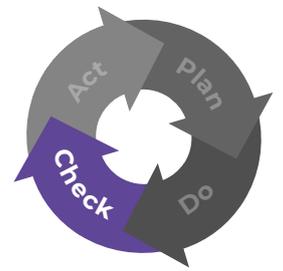
Requirements of the standard: Clause 9

9 Performance evaluation

This is the second largest clause in the standard and deals with how you check everything is working. It looks at how you monitor, analyse and evaluate your environmental performance and legal compliance. It also deals with internal audits and how top management should review the functioning and performance of the EMS.

Checking how you are performing is essential in seeking continual improvement. If you already have another ISO system in place, you will be very familiar with the concept here.

9.1 Monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation

For the purposes of **monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation** you need to determine:

- What to monitor and measure, covering as a minimum:

  - activities that help you achieve your environmental goals

  - activities for which you need to demonstrate legal compliance

- How you are going to monitor and analyse

- What indicators to use to assess your environmental performance

- A timetable for monitoring and analysing results

If you're using test equipment for monitoring purposes, it's important that it's maintained and calibrated and you keep records of it.
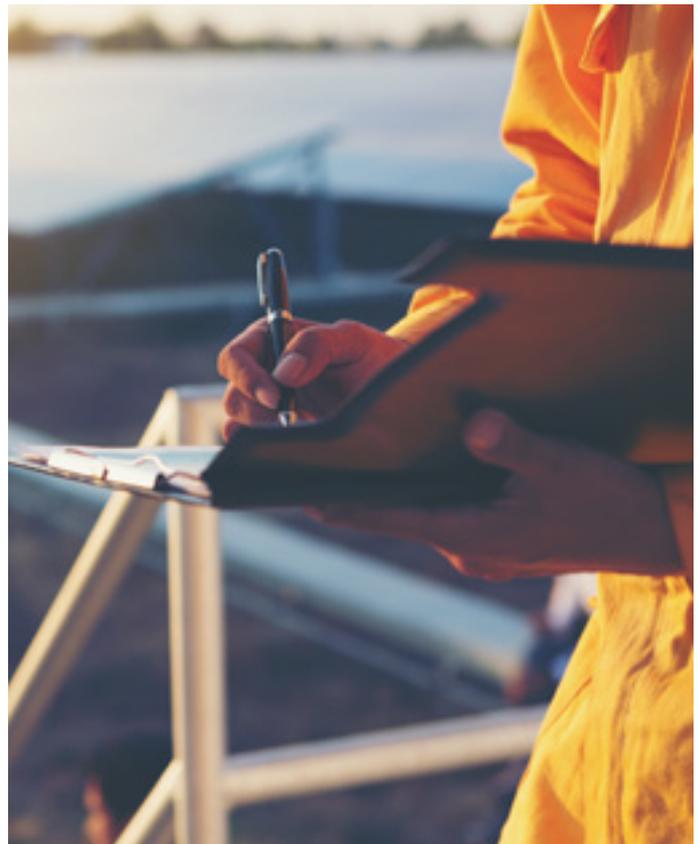
9.2 Internal audit

The only way to achieve continual improvement is to take ownership and responsibility for your EMS. You do this by getting under the skin of what is going on by performing an **internal audit**. This is to determine your conformance to:

*   Your own requirements

*   The requirements of the ISO 14001 standard

You must establish an **internal audit programme** (9.2.2) and make sure it's properly implemented and maintained. There are software solutions that can help you with this in terms of managing the timetable and actually conducting the audits.

In drawing up who audits what and when, you need to be mindful of the relative importance of the processes you are going to be auditing. Some will need more frequent auditing than others.

You should ensure that people conducting the audits are impartial and competent to do so. Although it's called an 'internal audit', it's acceptable to outsource this function. On the one hand, by outsourcing, you may not develop the ownership of the system but on the other, it's helpful to get the view of an impartial outsider who can also bring their expertise to your organisation.

9.3 Management review

Top management must evaluate the EMS at planned intervals to ensure that the system is still suited to the organisation's needs and is performing effectively. The approach you should take to this is outlined in **management review**.

The purpose of this exercise is wide-ranging and includes consideration of the system in its entirety, whether the context you operate in has changed and a review of nonconformities. There's a lot more to it than that, but handily, the standard itself lays out very clearly what topics you should consider in your review. In effect, it gives you an agenda for it, so make sure you refer to that.
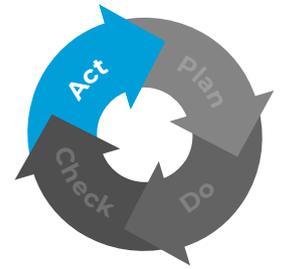
Requirements of the standard: Clause 10

10 Improvement

The final clause of ISO 14001 is about how you fix things that aren't going to plan. You're required to look at what you've learned through your audits (clause 9) and take appropriate action.

10.1 General

The standard makes it clear that you're required to implement actions to achieve the goals of your environmental management system. You can't just audit your system and file away the nonconformities to be dealt with at an unspecified date.

10.2 Nonconformity and corrective action

When conducting an audit, you will almost certainly find things that have gone wrong. However, you shouldn't wait for the auditor to uncover issues. You should raise nonconformities as they arise. In all instances you should:

- Take action to control and correct the problem
- Deal with the consequences, including mitigating adverse environmental impacts

You should then establish the root cause of the problem and tackle it to ensure it doesn't happen again. Make sure that you also include 'near misses'.

Part of this process also involves reviewing corrective actions to ensure they have been effective and making changes to the EMS if appropriate. You should keep documented information on all of this in order to be able to demonstrate to an auditor that your system is effective.

You can keep a simple log of these nonconformities and actions to keep on top of your EMS.

If you're familiar with other and older versions of ISO management systems you might be wondering what happened to the phrase "preventive action". In other words, taking action to prevent problems before they occur. This concept is now implicit in the system and scattered throughout the standard, for example in 6.1 (actions to address risks and opportunities).

10.3 Continual improvement

The final requirement of the standard is to ensure **continual improvement**. This is an essential component of all ISO management systems and at the heart of the PDCA cycle. This clause simply states in a single sentence that you must continually improve the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the EMS to enhance environmental performance. The only way to achieve this is through ensuring that you have implemented and are compliant with all the other requirements of the standard.

Audit date	Nonconformity identified	Responsibility	Target date	Corrective action taken	Corrective action reviewed	Date closed
18/3/2018	Boiler timer not functioning	Operations Supervisor	25/3/2018	Service contractors called. New timer installed	Service contractors late, review suppliers	2/4/2018

Summary

Implementing an ISO 14001 compliant Environmental Management System is not a decision you take lightly.

You need to dedicate time and resource to learning what's involved, the implementation of the system and its upkeep.

You'll undergo annual surveillance audits and a three-year certification cycle to review your management system and ensure continual improvement. So, you can't just install your EMS and forget about it.

But it doesn't need to be daunting. Indeed, you may choose to use an independent consultant to help you build, implement and maintain your system. But however you do it, you need to take ownership and demonstrate commitment. To do that, you need to understand the requirements of ISO 14001.

Hopefully this guide has removed some of the mystery.

Who is UKAS?

Not all certificates are equal.

You need to make sure your certificate is issued by a body that has been accredited by the government-recognised United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS).

A UKAS accredited certification body like ISOQAR undergoes regular rigorous inspections by UKAS to check we are operating to the highest standards.

This means that when you hold a certificate from a UKAS accredited body, you can be sure it's more meaningful. Certificates that are issued by bodies which are not UKAS accredited are often not accepted.

UKAS accredited certificates are accepted across the world as evidence that you meet global standards of best practice.

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