



Raising the standard: ISO certified companies will need to update their systems.

EMS revision brings clarity – and paperwork

The international standards for environmental management systems have been revised for the first time in eight years, writes Aaron Westwood.

Business and industry have responded positively to the revisions of the two environmental management standards, *ISO 14001:2004 Environmental management systems – Requirements with guidance for use* and *ISO 14004:2004 Environmental management systems – General guidelines on principles, systems and support techniques*.

The review has not changed the function and principles of the two standards but provides increased clarity and additional guidance. It also makes them more compatible with ISO 9001:2000 for Quality Management Systems.

There are, however, some important alterations that will require organisations already certified to ISO 14001:1996 to make some changes to their environmental management system (EMS) to maintain certification. Of the 74,000 certifications worldwide, 1,250 of them are in Australia. Organisations have until May 2006 to conform to the revised standard, but some are opting to make changes to their EMS and seek updated certification sooner rather than later.

Many are welcoming the changes.

Kevin Cross, EMS officer at Macquarie Generation, said “the revisions to the standard have assisted us in clarifying what is expected of the EMS and its related documentation as we implement the final elements of the EMS prior to seeking certification”.

MAINTAINING COMPLIANCE

The introduction to the revised version includes two additional paragraphs which clarify the focus of the standard.

An explanation of the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) model used in the ISO 9001 quality standard has also been included, together with additional text promoting the process approach and possible alignment and integration with other management systems. As Integrated Management Systems (IMS) become more common, many organisations will benefit from having the standard aligned with ISO 9000.

Important changes in wording also provide organisations with certainty about what the standard requires of their EMS, perhaps the most significant of these being the addition of the words

“persons working for or on behalf of the organisation” in place of “personnel” or “employees and members”. This change has been made to ensure that external contractors and applicable suppliers are included under the requirements of certain elements of the EMS.

The revised standard also requires management to “ensure the availability” of resources, rather than “provide resources” as in the 1996 standard. This means, for example, that organisations will need to demonstrate that there are contingency plans in place to ensure competent people are able to fulfill specific EMS roles in the event of a key person leaving or being absent through training, vacation or illness.

In addition, it stipulates that all documents required by both ISO 14001:2004 and the EMS be controlled, in contrast to the 1996 version which included only those documents required by the standard itself. This will greatly increase the number of documents requiring control by some organisations, including EMS-related documents of external origin.

MINOR MODIFICATIONS

An existing EMS which is well implemented and maintained is likely to require only minor modifications to comply with the revised standard.

Transition from the 1996 standard does not require additional training. However, the revised standard requires that audits of the EMS are conducted as internal audits and organisations should ensure they have competent auditors to conduct them.

Having worked with organisations which are implementing the ISO 14001 standard, whether for third-party certification or as a guide to implementing a management program, we have found its greatest attribute is its flexibility and ability to suit a variety of organisations. The updated version is simply the next progression in the development of a globally applicable standard, which is due to commence its next revision in 2006.

Aaron Westwood is with Graham A Brown & Associates. The consultancy has compiled a comprehensive evaluation of the changes to ISO 14001 for free download (www.grahamabrown.com.au).

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