# Keeping up with the times: ISO14001

Nearly 10 years after its last revision, the ISO Technical Committee 207 is undertaking the most comprehensive revision yet to the environmental management systems standard.

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The current version of ISO14001 environmental management systems – requirements with guidance for use was released in 2004 and has been adopted in 158 countries. Since its original release nearly 20 years ago, more than 265,000 certificates have been issued worldwide and more than 2000 sites certified in Australia.

In the past 10 years we have seen a fundamental change in the way companies approach the management of environmental risks and the implementation of the systems that guide them. As the lowest common denominator for certified organisations – and driving improvements throughout the supply chain – it's time for ISO14001 to step it up a notch.

Following more than a year of work, ISO/TC 207 published a first committee draft of the revised standard in April.

## First impressions

The first thing we notice about the revised standard is its content and structure. As the first management system standard to be restructured to align with ISO's high-level clause structure, it looks more like the ISO9001 quality systems standard than the old environmental management system standard.

Closer inspection reveals a completely different flow but one still based around the "plan-do-check-act" cycle we are used to. The main text will continue to provide the requirements for the EMS (now spread over sections 4-10) and the annex has been revised to provide interpretation of the requirements rather than guidance, as it does currently.

ISO14004 environmental management systems – general guidelines on principles, systems and support will continue to provide guidance on implementation and will be updated and released at the same time as the new ISO14001.

## Part of business strategy

The restructure puts management commitment at the forefront, with a definition of top management added to ensure the appropriate level of management is involved. Top management's involvement is more defined too, with more detail around the role of leaders in the implementation and review of the EMS.

With top management more involved and new requirements for the EMS to be integrated into core business processes and aligned with overall company strategy, the work for environment managers should become a little easier.

"I see a lot of companies using ISO14001 because it's a compliance issue and, while the EMS might work really well, it's sidelined. The environment manager has to knock very loudly on the door of the managing director rather than being invited in," IEMA member and EHSCon director Anya Ledwith said.

"The new requirements will help combat this and to cement the role of an EMS in the organisation. I think it will ensure that the work of the environment managers is recognised more strongly."

## Beyond the boundary

Arguably the changes with the broadest impact on the EMS are the expansion of the EMS scope to apply to aspects across an organisation's value chain and the introduction of a life cycle perspective when determining aspects and impacts.

Considering a life cycle perspective when identifying aspects and impacts does not necessarily require a life cycle analysis, but it does expand the control and/or influence an organisation is expected to exert.

The "value chain planning and control" section confirms the intent of the standard, requiring organisations to "ensure that upstream and downstream processes related to significant environmental aspects are controlled or influenced". This includes outsourced processes and the processes behind design and development of activities, products and services, so organisations with robust procurement and supplier/contractor management systems in place will generally be better placed to integrate these new requirements.

Many organisations will look to their ISO9001 quality systems for management of upstream impacts but downstream impacts are often among an organisation's biggest and not all organisations will be well placed to control or influence these.

## Performance evaluation

Whether it's because the organisation itself sets "status quo" objectives, or the certification auditors are focused on system maintenance, many EMS practitioners believe ISO14001 doesn't push organisations far enough on continual improvement.

The revision strengthen requirements for setting objectives and evaluating performance by introducing "environmental performance indicators". This section requires at least one indicator for each objective, with performance evaluated and demonstrated for each indicator. Monitoring and measurement requirements are extended to the key characteristics of the value chain that can have a significant impact and the criteria against which environmental performance will be evaluated must be determined.

The additions should see organisations moving towards more improvement-based objectives. However, much of this will rest on management's ability to set meaningful environmental performance indicators and challenge themselves to continually improve on them.

The draft international standard is released in early 2014. WME