

# A practical guide to ISO 14001:2015



Management system standards are revised to keep them current, relevant to market changes, to introduce new environmental methods and thinking and to maintain compatibility with other applicable standards.

ISO 14001:2015 follows the new ISO high level structure format defined in Annex SL that provides a framework for a generic management system standard with a high level structure, identical core text, common clause titles and common terms and definitions. In future, all management system standards will migrate at their next revision to have the same look and feel, offering ease of integration, compatibility and consistency.

There are some significant new requirements in ISO 14001:2015, together with amended definitions that need to be considered. “Shall” is used to indicate a requirement and there are more than 70 of them but many are carried over from ISO 14001:2004.

There are also more than 20 requirements for documented information which can include manuals, policies, procedures and records.

[This document highlights the significant changes.](#)

## INTRODUCTION

---

The Plan-Do-Check-Act model is the basis of a successful management system, following the cycle of Plan (objectives and processes), Do (implement the processes), Check (monitor and measure processes), Act (take action to continually improve).

Although there is no requirement for formal risk assessments, ISO 14001:2015 requires risk-based thinking and considering risk appears in several clauses throughout the standard.

## SCOPE

---

ISO 14001:2015 can be applied to any organisation regardless of size, type and nature and specifies requirements for an environmental management system that can be used to improve your environmental performance.

## TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

---

There are a number of new terms and definitions in ISO 14001:2015 such as *documented information* that need to be considered.

## CONTEXT OF THE ORGANISATION

---

### Understanding the organisation and its context

You need a high-level understanding of the external and internal issues that can affect the achievement of your intended environmental outcomes and the environmental conditions that you can affect.

External issues can include climate, air and water quality, land use, political, social or regulatory requirements.

Internal issues could be your own organisational culture, products, services and processes.

These issues can result in risks and opportunities that affect your environmental outcomes.

The context of your organisation will influence the type and complexity of management system required.

### Understanding the needs and expectations of interested parties

You need a high level understanding of who your relevant interested parties such as customers, employees, neighbours or regulators are and what their needs and expectations might be. These needs and expectations could become organisational requirements or compliance obligations such as contractual, voluntary or regulatory requirements.

## Determining the scope of the quality management system

You have the flexibility to define the scope and boundaries of your environmental system which can be physical or system-based and all your activities, products and services within that scope should be included. It should not be used to exclude activities that can have significant environmental aspects.

Documented information is required.

## LEADERSHIP

---

### Leadership and commitment

There is greater emphasis on the role of top management who, in addition to managing the system are now required to demonstrate leadership by establishing policy and objectives and promoting continual improvement.

Responsibility can be delegated and key staff should be involved at appropriate levels but top management must remain accountable and a hands-on approach is necessary. Third party audits will require a significant input from top management which will form part of the audit plan. Expect top management to be interviewed on topics such as policies, objectives, targets, planning, compliance obligations, protection of the environment and assignment of roles and responsibilities amongst others.

Your top management is required to take a forward thinking approach and demonstrate leadership by establishing policy and objectives, promoting continual improvement, a process approach and risk based thinking.

### Environmental policy

The policy must be established by top management, include commitments to protection of the environment, prevention of pollution, fulfilment of compliance obligations and continual improvement.

The policy must be communicated internally, be available to interested parties and documented information is required.

## PLANNING

---

### Actions to address risks and opportunities

Risk is associated with the consequences of an event and the likelihood of occurrence. By carrying out effective planning, organisations can prevent or reduce undesired effects and reduce the need for corrective action. Considering risk and planning what is required, who is expected to carry it out and when it is required is preferable to correcting errors and is an easier concept to understand than the need for preventive action required by previous versions of ISO 14001.

You need to establish processes that take account of internal and external issues, the requirements of your interested parties and your scope. You should determine the risks and opportunities relevant to your environmental aspects and your compliance obligations. You can consider risks such as spillages, drought, flooding due to climate change, lack of resources or the use of new technology.

You should also identify potential emergency situations that can have an environmental impact.

### Environmental aspects

You should determine the environmental aspects of your activities, products and services that you can control and influence and their associated environmental impacts.

Aspects can result in adverse or positive impacts (threats and opportunities). Consider a high level life cycle such as control of raw materials, design, production, delivery, use and end of life disposal. Think about inputs and outputs of processes and abnormal conditions such as start-up or shut down.

Consider air emissions, releases to water and land, use of resources, use of energy, creation of waste and use of space.

Documented information is required.

### Compliance obligations

Documented, detailed compliance obligations such as mandatory legal and regulatory requirements or voluntary requirements should be made available.

### Planning action

You should carry out high level planning and take action to address your environmental aspects, compliance obligations and identified risks and opportunities. Consider technology, best available techniques, financial and business requirements when planning.

### Communication

Define what, when, with whom and how communication takes place and who by.

Take into account your compliance obligations, ensure that information is consistent and reliable and respond to relevant communications about your environmental management system, retaining any appropriate evidence. Documented information is required.

### Internal communication

Communicate relevant information internally, ensuring that persons doing work under your control can contribute to continual improvement.

## External communication

Communicate relevant information externally as required by your communication processes and compliance obligations.

## PRACTICAL STEPS TO TRANSITION

---

By going for early transition, you will gain the benefits of implementing the most up-to-date thinking on management system standards and demonstrating your commitment to your management system by maintaining it to the latest requirements.

If you have implemented other management system standards such as ISO 9001 that also follow the same high level structure, it will be relatively easy to integrate them with each other.

- ◆ Obtain a copy of ISO 14001:2015 you can order this through the Alcumus ISOQAR website [www.alcumusgroup/isoqar](http://www.alcumusgroup/isoqar)
- ◆ Carry out a gap analysis of your current system against new requirements. Document and implement any changes to comply with the standard
- ◆ Train your employees
- ◆ Carry out an internal audit against requirements and implement any corrective action required
- ◆ Decide when you would like your transition audit and contact us to arrange dates
- ◆ If you are already certified to ISO 14001 you can go for transition on a scheduled surveillance audit, recertification audit or have a separate stand-alone transition audit
- ◆ If you are not yet certified to a management system standard, please contact our Technical Sales team on 0161 866 6186

## HOW CAN WE HELP?

---

- ◆ You can attend a transition training course, Alcumus Academy offer a range of suitable courses to help with transition, you can contact them on 0161 866 6189
- ◆ Practical advice is available on the Alcumus ISOQAR website [www.alcumusgroup/isoqar](http://www.alcumusgroup/isoqar)
- ◆ There are checklists available on the website that you can download
- ◆ We can carry out a pre-assessment at a time to suit you
- ◆ Talk to your auditor, they will have the most up-to-date information
- ◆ You can contact our Technical Department on 0161 866 6188

## SUMMARY

---

The Draft International Standard (DIS) was published on 01 July 2014

The Final Draft International Standard (FDIS) was published on 02 July 2015

ISO 14001:2015 was published on 23 September 2015 and you will have three years from date of publication to complete your transition.

If you need advice on the transition or are considering attendance on a training course, please call or e-mail [info@alcumusgroup.com](mailto:info@alcumusgroup.com)

Disclaimer