
Environmental Management Systems – ISO 14001

ISO 14000 is a series of standards and guideline documents (not regulations) formulated by the International Organization for Standardization (Geneva, Switzerland) to harmonize environmental management for all organizations worldwide.

What is ISO 14001?

The heart of the ISO series is *ISO 14001: Environmental Management Systems* (EMS). This is the standard organizations must meet to become ISO certified. While certification to the ISO 14001 Standard is *voluntary*, the Standard has become increasingly popular. This popularity is driven by such forces as government interests, customer/supplier requirements, spiraling waste disposal costs, and the public's interest in knowing what organizations are doing about their environmental issues. Additionally, organizations that are moving toward Sustainable Development find ISO 14001 effective as a framework for Sustainability Programs.

How do I benefit from ISO 14001?

Benefits to implementing an EMS include providing a structured approach to environmental management that can help organizations achieve cost savings, regulatory compliance, increased market shares, and national and international recognition. Additionally, establishment of a system approach to environmental management can give an organization an integrated monitoring and recordkeeping model that compliments its environmental strategy or sustainability goals.

Taking a Proactive Approach

ISO 14001 provides a proactive approach to environmental management that shifts an organization away from “command-and-control” methods and moves organizations beyond regulatory compliance and into an “environmental leadership” role. An EMS provides public recognition and an enhanced performance image for organizational stakeholders. Through the EMS's documentation and communication systems all components of an organization work together to achieve organization wide environmental excellence and sustainability.

Certifying versus Aligning your EMS

There are three-ways to manage your organization's environmental program: certify that your EMS meets all the requirements of the ISO 14001 Standard through a Third-Party (usually an ISO 14001 Registrar); establish your EMS to meet the requirements of the USEPA's National Environmental Performance Track; or implement an ISO 14001-aligned EMS that meets most of the requirements of the ISO 14001 Standard, as chosen by your organization, but does not include ISO certification.

Technical Assistance Available

General Awareness Workshop — General Executive overview of the ISO 14001 requirements (2-hours).

Gap Analysis Assessment — Typically, a two-day evaluation of an organization's environmental management system. The assessment identifies disparities between existing systems and the ISO 14001 Standard - providing organizations with a ‘road map’ for implementing their EMS.

Internal Auditor Training — Illinois Sustainable Technology Center will help companies develop the internal capacity to audit the EMS and ensure that it is operating effectively and conforming to the requirements of the ISO 14001 Standard (2-days). A third-day may be incorporated to perform an actual internal audit of the organization with the newly trained auditors.

EMS Implementation Assistance — A series of five-workshops tailored to provide the essential information that organizations need to develop and implement an ISO 14001 certified or aligned Environmental Management System. You'll learn: the key requirements of the ISO Standard; how to identify and rank environmental aspects and impacts; how to identify legal and other requirements; how to identify where you need operational control; and how to perform an internal audit. The organization will be responsible to transfer learned knowledge and procedures to the organization's EMS. Workshops will meet typically once a month (5, 4-hours classes).