ISO 14001 Overview and Guidance

This guidance document provides an overview of the **ISO 14001:2026 Environmental Management Systems standard.**

Introduction

The ISO 14001 standard details requirements for environmental management systems. The aim of this standard is to help organisations to formally identify and review the impact their activities could potentially have on the environment, and to develop procedures and mechanisms to manage that impact, reduce environmental risk and continually improve environmental performance.

The current version of the standard is ISO 14001:2026, published on 15 April 2026. The previous version is ISO 14001:2015.

ISO 14001:2026 follows the harmonised structure used by ISO management system standards (formerly known as Annex SL), so its clauses align closely with ISO 9001, ISO 45001 and other management system standards. The standard requires a clearly defined organisational structure with roles and responsibilities, planned and managed processes, monitoring and measurement of environmental performance, and continual improvement.

Environmental Management

One of the key requirements of this standard is emergency preparedness and response, and it is therefore important to ensure that effective resources and checks are in place to ensure the organisation meets all fire safety and environmental emergency requirements and can respond effectively to any environmental incident such as a spill, leak, or release of harmful materials.

A formal review of environmental aspects and impacts is also required. This helps with overall awareness of the actual and potential impact on the environment from operations, and ensures that consideration is given to the processes and controls in place to respond to incidents and prevent further harm.

When determining environmental aspects and impacts under ISO 14001:2026, it is necessary to consider operations under normal conditions, abnormal conditions (planned shutdowns, maintenance, equipment failure) and emergency situations. Aspects must be evaluated against whether the impact could be significant - including consideration of climate change, biodiversity, pollution and resource depletion - and whether there is any legislation covering the impact.

When considering environmental aspects and impacts it is also necessary to demonstrate that a lifecycle perspective has been taken. The purpose of the lifecycle perspective is to consider how environmental performance could be improved by considering all stages of an activity or product - from upstream raw materials and supplier operations, through the organisation's own operations, to downstream customer use and end-of-life disposal. The lifecycle perspective

recognises that some aspects are within the organisation's direct control while others can only be influenced.

ISO 14001:2026 Certification Audit

During an audit the auditor(s) will be looking for objective evidence that each clause in the standard has been met and complied with. As well as reviewing all the relevant clauses, there are various things you can prepare and have in place prior to the audit;

- Completed and up-to-date management review, including setting and reviewing environmental objectives
- Completed internal audit(s) covering environmental management, with defined objectives for each audit
- Evidence of waste management and associated records, complying with any mandatory record retention requirements
- Waste facilities being used correctly and waste streams segregated as required
- Environmental aspects and impacts assessment documentation, covering normal, abnormal and emergency conditions
- Evidence of consideration of the lifecycle perspective
- Evidence of compliance with applicable regulations, including an up-to-date legal register
- Evidence of the source of updates for environmental legislation, and evidence that updates have been reviewed
- Evidence of roles relating to environmental management being clearly identified
- Evidence of staff environmental awareness and emergency response training
- Evidence of monitoring, inspection and maintenance of emergency equipment
- Evidence of planning for potential emergency situations
- Evidence of how changes to the environmental management system are planned and managed (clause 6.3)
- Evidence that environmental conditions including climate change, biodiversity, pollution levels and resource availability have been considered when identifying external and internal issues (clause 4.1)
- Evidence that externally provided processes, products and services relevant to the EMS have been identified and controlled (clause 8.1)

Further information about the ISO 14001 audit process and guidance for preparing for a certification audit is available at the following pages;

- ISO Certification Guidance: isoassured.co.uk/resources/iso-certification-help
- Remote support: isomanaged.com/iso-consultancy-support

Knowledge Base

Clause by clause guidance on ISO 14001, worked examples and answers to the questions that come up most often are published in the isomanaged knowledge base:

isomanaged.com/knowledge-base/iso-standards/iso-14001