

ISO 14000 IN BRIEF

-- Adopted from TC/207 Website --

What is ISO?

ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies, at present comprising 127 members, one in each country. The object of ISO is to promote the development of standardization and related activities in the world with a view to facilitating international exchange of goods and services, and to developing cooperation in the spheres of intellectual, scientific, technological and economic activity. The results of ISO technical work are published as International Standards.

What is ISO 14000?

ISO 14000 is a series of international, voluntary environmental management standards. Developed under ISO Technical Committee 207, the 14000 series of standards address the following aspects of environmental management:

- Environmental Management Systems (EMS)
- Environmental Auditing & Related Investigations (EA&RI)
- Environmental Labels and Declarations (EL)
- Environmental Performance Evaluation (EPE)
- Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), and
- Terms and Definitions (T&D)

The ISO series of standards effectively address the needs of organizations worldwide by providing a common framework for managing environmental issues; they promise to effect a broadly based improvement in environmental management, which in turn can facilitate trade and improve environmental performance worldwide.

What are the principles behind the ISO 14000 standards?

The ISO 14000 standards are being developed with the following key principles in mind:

- They must result in better environmental management
- They must be applicable in all nations
- They should promote the broad interests of the public and the users of the standards
- They should be cost effective, non-prescriptive, and flexible, to allow them to meet the differing needs of organizations of any size worldwide
- As part of their flexibility, they should be suitable for internal or external verification
- They should be scientifically based
- And above all, they should be practical, useful and useable

What is an Environmental Management System (EMS)?

An environmental management system (EMS) is a systematic approach to dealing with the environmental aspects of an organization. It is a 'tool' that enables an organization of any size or type to control the impact of its activities, products or services on the natural environment.

What are the benefits of an EMS?

- Assuring customers of commitment to demonstrable environmental management
- Maintaining good public/community relations
- Satisfying investor criteria and improving access to capital
- Obtaining insurance at reasonable cost
- Enhancing image and market share
- Meeting vendor certification criteria
- Improving cost control
- Reducing incidents that result in liability
- Demonstrating reasonable care
- Conserving input materials and energy
- Facilitating the attainment of permits and authorizations
- Fostering development and sharing environmental solutions
- Improving industry-government relations

Are the ISO 14000 standards 'organization' or 'product' oriented?

The standards in the ISO 14000 series fall into two major groups: organization-oriented standards, and product-oriented standards.

The organization-oriented standards provide comprehensive guidance for establishing, maintaining and evaluating an environmental management system (EMS). They are also concerned with other organization-wide environmental systems and functions.

The product-oriented standards are concerned with determining the environmental impacts of products and services over their life cycles, and with environmental labels and declarations. These standards will help an organization gather information it needs in order to support its planning and decisions, and to communicate specific environmental information to consumers and other interested parties.

How are Small & Medium sized Enterprises (SME's) and Developing countries affected by the ISO 14000 standards?

ISO member bodies in many developing countries recognized early on the potential significance of the ISO 14000 series, and have been active participants in the standards development process. This participation, combined with ISO efforts to meet the similar concerns of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs), has had important effects on the overall shape and focus of the core EMS standards in the ISO 14000 series.

What are the trade issues associated with the ISO 14000 standards?

The intent of environmental management standards has been to develop a common language for environmental issues, so that customers, manufacturers, governments and other organizations can be assured that environmental issues have been taken into account in the activities and products of their trading partners.

However, ISO is also aware that standards can be used to limit trade - a fact recognized by the World Trade Organization when it set limits on the use of "non-tariff barriers" to trade. Environmental issues are highly regulated in many countries, and there are pressures in some areas to use regulations, as well as national and

regional standards, to exclude goods and services on environmental grounds. On the commercial level, environmentally-related expectations and requirements of purchasers can have a significant effect on purchasing decisions, and can also affect trade.

By concentrating on management standards, and by emphasizing guidance over strict specifications in its documents, ISO has tried to create a positive mechanism for improving trade, while encouraging improvements in environmental performance. Its challenge now is to help ensure that the standards are used as intended, and not as a barrier to trade.

What is the relationship between conformity assessment for environmental management standards and government regulation?

Many governments are beginning to recognize the limits to "command and control" environmental regulation, and some have expressed interest in environmental management standards as a complement to regulation. While some governments have taken a "hands off" approach, and have let the marketplace itself promote the use of these standards, other governmental bodies have tried to form links between voluntary standards and mandatory regulation.

ISO 14001 requires organizations to establish and maintain procedures to:

1. identify and have access to relevant legislation and regulations.
2. ensure that its legislative records are applicable to its business activities.
3. ISO 14001 also provides the ideal management structure to centrally store and maintain permits, licenses, authorizations, etc.

Voluntary Environmental Standards will provide a basis for governments to meet international obligations through forums of environmental protection and management that are alternatives to the traditional command and control model.