What are the ISO 14001 requirements?

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If you’re not sure what is required for ISO 14001 certification, this comprehensive article offers details of the documentation you’ll need to prepare for the Environmental Management Standard.

**What documents do you need for ISO 14001?**

ISO 14001 requires you to maintain documented evidence that your Environmental Management System (EMS) meets the required standard. Although there are clear requirements as to what kind of documentation you must provide, how you operate and how you record your evidence is not dictated by the standard. The goal of your documentation is to ensure that robust environmental processes are in place. Some of these documents also serve to demonstrate that your entire organisation is aware of and working towards your environmental objectives, which will help you reach environmental goals that are both tangible and feasible.

**Scope of the Environmental Management System**

The scope sets out the type of operations your EMS covers and the boundaries that will be placed upon it.

Establishing the boundaries will require you to outline which parts of your organisation will be subject to the EMS.  This will include processes, sites, departments, divisions, etc.

Outlining the scope of the management system will involve describing the types of products and services provided by your organisation, and where they are provided (i.e. regionally/across the UK/throughout Europe/worldwide).

In most cases, your EMS will be applied to your entire organisation, but there may be circumstances where it is either inappropriate or impossible for a process, site, or team to fall under the scope of your management system, in which case a narrower, more specific scope will be required.

**Environmental Policy**

The Environmental Policy briefly describes your organisation’s commitment to take responsibility for the effects on the wider environment and any legal requirements.  The policy will include clear commitment to prevent pollution, and to continually improve the way your business seeks to deliver upon its environmental objectives.

**Evaluation of Environmental Risks and Opportunities**

This will outline and acknowledge the environmental risks and opportunities which may be encountered by operating the organisation.  They will include risks in abnormal and emergency situations.  This will also include opportunities to embrace change and make environmental improvements.

The standard doesn’t prescribe a particular methodology or risk process to be documented, but you will need to demonstrate that a risk-based approach is being followed.

You should be able to explain the methodology and approach you are using, along with documented evidence such as a business plan, strategy or operational plan. This documented evidence could be linked to the various clauses of the standard, which would help provide the analyses needed to meet this requirement.

**Evaluation of Environmental Aspects**

Environmental aspects are the activities that result in an impact on the environment. As every business consumes materials, uses energy and generates waste in operating the business environmental impacts will occur as a result.

Examples of environmental aspects include the following:

* Use of utilities such as water, electricity, gas etc.
* Generation of waste
* Air emissions, smoke and fumes
* Disposal of effluents
* Management of activities with the potential to cause pollution such as bulk oil storage tanks.

Once you have identified these environmental aspects, you’ll need to determine the impact they could have on the environment and, using a “risk” scoring system, identify the aspects that are the most significant.

The scoring system isn’t prescribed by the standard; as long as it is adequate to the task, it can be as simple or complex as you desire. There are a number of methods you could employ that can help to identify the likelihood of an event (failure) happening and the potential impact if it does. Therefore, a high-risk impact event that is likely to occur would receive a high score, indicating that it is a concern for the business, whereas a low-risk impact event that is unlikely to occur would receive a low score.

The environmental aspects, their impact, and the scoring system should be regularly reviewed to capture any changes to your organisation.

**Environmental Objectives and plans for achieving them**

Your organisation should have clear environmental objectives, and a clear plan of how those objectives can be achieved.  The outcomes of the “risk” scoring of environmental aspects can help the business to prioritise activities that would benefit from being monitored.

Where possible, objectives should be measurable.  Examples of common environmental objectives include:

* Recording monthly electricity consumption in kWh.
* Recording monthly waste tonnages
* Recording business miles and costs avoided as a result of using video conferencing.

The purpose of the objectives is to generate data that helps the management team to make informed environmental choices for the business.  The data may help to prioritise or justify investments in new, more efficient assets.  After the installation of the new assets, the data will also help to prove if the predicted improvements were achieved.

Where a business has historic data for its production output and utility consumption, objectives can be developed to calculate efficiencies.  The numbers of products per kWh consumed can be calculated.

If your business is considering the business case for investments in solar PV, Battery electric delivery vans, LED lighting or new motors and pumps.  Environmental objectives could be focused on collecting the real-world data to be used when putting together the business case.

Your objectives should clearly establish:

* who has ownership of each objective
* how progress will be monitored
* any specialised equipment or services required to achieve each objective
* a timeline for achieving each objective

Your efforts to achieve your objectives will rarely exist in a vacuum; often they’ll rely on each other or even cross over. Auditors will expect to see how your objectives relate to each other, as well as how they are consistent with your Environmental Policy.

**Operational Control Procedures**

ISO 14001 requires organisations to define and execute its own operational controls in a manner appropriate to the sector it operates in. As such, the standard doesn’t prescribe those controls or how they should be implemented, but you do need to keep documented evidence that your operational controls ensure that:

* all legal and compliance requirements are being met
* environmental objectives have been assessed and set
* internal, external, and outsourced processes have been defined
* any training requirements have been assessed, implemented, and reviewed.

If your business has a bulk oil storage tank, your auditor may expect to see the operational controls for filling the tank or decanting from the tank.  Procedures and training for spill clean up would also be expected.  If your business has an effluent treatment plant, the operational instructions and training needed to run the plant should be available.  The best starting point is to take a look at your environmental aspects register and write down the controls that are in place for all of the organisation environmental aspects.  If documented controls do not exist, now may be a good time to write them.

**Procedure for Emergency Preparedness and Response**

Emergencies can be situations that arise within your organisation that affect the environment or environmental events that affect your organisation. You need to demonstrate that your organisation can respond to either.

You need to have in place processes that can identify and respond to emergencies. These responses need to make sure that any environmental impact is kept to a minimum. Your procedures should have been tested, and any relevant parties should have received the necessary training to undertake the response.  Loss of power, fire, flood and chemical spillage are common examples of environmental emergencies that your organisation may need to plan to manage.

**List of Interested Parties, Legal and Other Requirements**

Interested parties are those, without whom the business would be unable to function.  Those we chose to work with have an effect on the organisation’s effect on the wider environment.  The needs and expectations of interested parties are to be considered within the management system.

The requirements of these parties will place varying obligations on your organisation, from legal obligation to business obligations. You should record the requirements of all these parties so that they can be considered when planning your EMS. Once they are required, you can determine how to meet your obligations with the minimum impact on your environmental objectives.

An example of an interested party might be a customer that expects good to be delivered in a Battery Electric Vehicle or a local community objecting to your proposals to undertake major construction work.

Naturally, interested parties may change, or they may remain but their requirements might alter. You need to regularly review interested parties and ensure that any changes are fed into your EMS.

**Competence records**

Introducing an EMS often introduces new practices or requirements, and so can often lead to additional training. Recording the training and competence levels of every member of your organisation will make it easier to track any required upskilling. It will also help demonstrate that everyone in your organisation is competent when it comes to their environmental responsibilities.

**Evidence of Communication**

It’s important that everyone in your organisation is aware of the existence of the management system and their obligations, which is why it’s important to show that you are sending clear communications both internally and externally. Internal communications, including emails, meetings, bulletin boards or Intranet announcements, will inform members of your organisation of your environmental objectives, how they are expected to contribute towards them, and what their responsibilities are.

External communications might include emails, meetings, letters and contracts, and are more likely to detail what you expect from a supplier in order to meet your environmental objectives, or how you will meet your environmental obligations to a third party.

**Monitoring Performance Information**

One of the [benefits of ISO 14001](https://www.british-assessment.co.uk/insights/the-business-benefits-of-iso-14001/) is its emphasis on continual improvement, which is why a key part of an EMS is to monitor its performance and effectiveness. You’ll need to have a record of these evaluations, as well as evidence that your organisation has considered what to measure, how and when, and that the outcomes from any decisions are ensuring appropriate process control.

**Compliance obligations record**

It’s important that everyone in your organisation is aware of the legal environmental requirements they are subject to. As such, a competent evaluation must be carried out to establish relevant legal requirements, and regular reviews should be conducted to ensure this record is kept up-to-date with any changes. You should also record any obligations your organisation has to other parties.

**Internal Audit Programme and Results**

An internal audit is a key aspect of an EMS, assessing not just its effectiveness, but also your organisation’s overall environmental performance. They also help to demonstrate your compliance with the processes set up as part of implementing your EMS.

This record will hold the details of a regular internal audit program, as well as the results of any issues or opportunities for improvements such audits uncover.

**Management Review Results**

Senior management should regularly review the EMS to make sure that it remains effective, and a record should be kept of the results of these reviews in line with the standard.

**Nonconformities and Corrective Action**

Your organisation needs to document any non-conformities in your environmental processes and operations, and the actions you took as a result. You’ll need to include clear evidence as to how your organisation ensured that any corrective action has achieved conformity through a “root cause analysis”.

Your record should:

* document the details of non-conformity
* describe the actions taken
* detail any concessions obtained
* identify responsible individuals.