



## Minimal Environmental Impact? – ISO 14001 is still for you

Over 99% of organisations do not individually have significant environmental impact. However, their cumulative effect on the environment is probably greater than the small number of potentially significant environmental polluters. The international environmental management system (EMS) standard ISO 14001 was not developed solely for organisations with significant environmental impact. It was developed for all organisations regardless of the impact each organisation has on the environment.



Unfortunately, the growth of ISO 14001 registered organisations lags behind ISO 9001 registered organisations by a ratio of 1:10 worldwide. ISO 14001 is becoming more popular, predominately due to pressure from governments and non-governmental organisations (NGO's). In the UK, DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) continues to promote the use of ISO 14001 in all areas and at all levels of government (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/business/scp/pdf/ems.pdf>) and this is triggering interest in local authorities and throughout the supply chain supporting government activity. The construction industry is one such area where ISO 14001 is gaining a great deal of prominence.

So for those organisations who appear to have a limited impact on the environment; what use is adopting ISO 14001 to them? The certificate is always useful, but not always necessary, as customers may not specifically request ISO 14001 registration, well not yet anyway! Most organisations probably think the benefits do not justify the cost of implementing an effective environmental management system.

### ISO 14001 - The 5 compelling reasons

#### ***Corporate Social Responsibility***

Customers, staff and other stakeholders need evidence that organisations take environmental issues seriously.

#### ***An environmental performance framework***

ISO 14001 provides an excellent framework for identifying, managing and improving environmental performance.

#### ***Staff involvement***

Staff involvement engenders commitment to improving environmental performance.

#### ***Improvement momentum***

ISO 14001 is not a one-off initiative, it provides momentum to improving environmental performance over the longer term.

#### ***Managing change***

ISO 14001 ensures that environmental issues are addressed during periods of change enabling the organisation to re-focus its environmental management system.



## Implementation doesn't have to be difficult

The complexity of your EMS matches the significance of your environmental impact; with low significance your system does not have to be complex.

Those organisations who already have management systems based upon ISO 9001 (quality) or OHSAS 18001 (occupational health & safety) would find ISO 14001 relatively easy to implement. In fact, OHSAS 18001 and ISO 14001 highly complementary and can be integrated without too much difficulty.

An ISO 14001 environmental management system follows the format of Deming's PDCA cycle (Plan, Do, Check, Act).

Typically, implementation takes 6-12 months. One of the key tasks is the identification and evaluation of your organisation's environmental impacts. With a little external guidance your own staff will be able to complete all tasks to design and implement your EMS.



## Gaining the ISO 14001 Certificate

Unless registration i.e. gaining a certificate is a prime requirement then work at your own pace to construct an effective EMS which is owned by everyone in the organisation. Ensure that the ISO 14001 requirements have been met by conducting internal audits. Consider seeking registration to ISO 14001 when the conditions dictate e.g. when your customers or other stakeholders would receive some benefit from registration. Clearly, even though your customers may not specifically require an ISO 14001 certificate your employees may see registration as recognition for their efforts in improving the organisation's environmental performance.

## Continually improving environmental performance

An organisation's staff will provide many of the ideas for improving environmental performance. By training staff to conduct regular internal audits of the EMS an organisation will identify many opportunities for improving environmental performance which can be reviewed by management.

## The future

Public awareness of environmental issues is unlikely to abate and the business community has to rise to the challenge and opportunities that improving environmental performance will bring. Adopting ISO 14001 is just one way of demonstrating commitment, and in a global marketplace an internationally accepted standard provides credibility to an organisation's environmental performance.