

10 STEPS TO ISO 14001 CERTIFICATION

Implementing an Environmental Management System (EMS) can help you manage environmental risks, provide assurances in legal compliance and demonstrate your environmental credentials to your stakeholders.

DNV GL offers 10 simple steps to certification:

1. Identify your key drivers

It is recommended you identify and review your key drivers for implementing an EMS and the goals that you want to achieve from embarking on the journey. Remember that a key requirement is to ensure continual improvement of environmental performance.

2. Access your resources and define your strategy

Do you have a budget for implementing the EMS and the key competencies available within your business? It is important to remember that effective implementation will require commitment throughout and should not be seen as one person's responsibility. Commitment starts with senior management and they should decide the implementation strategy and timelines. An implementation plan should be developed and a dedicated team assigned.

3. Dialogue with your certification body

An early dialogue with your preferred certification body can help to dismiss some of the myths surrounding ISO 14001. Whilst direct consultancy is not permitted, general guidance and the approach to certification can be discussed.

4. Gap analysis?

A useful first step could be to undertake a gap analysis between the management system processes you currently have in place and the requirements of ISO 14001. As many companies currently have some form of management system in place and as 14001 requires a firm understanding and commitment to comply with legal requirements there could be some already existent processes in place. A gap analysis could be conducted in-house or using external resources.

5. System integration?

At an early stage it is recommended that you review whether or not to integrate your EMS with other systems. The advantage is that this can minimise the number of procedures required and therefore cause less confusion; but there is a risk that integration can dilute the impact of a system (e.g. production or health and safety related processes over-riding environmental considerations and focus). One recommendation, however, is that duplication within management systems is avoided.

6. Develop your EMS - what are your impacts?

It is recommended that you tailor your EMS to your business. A good place to start is the identification of environmental aspects and impacts. There are various approaches that can be used and matters that are often overlooked include the use of natural resources such as energy and water, and past activities with reference to the potential for contaminated land.

So-called "indirect impacts" such as the practices of suppliers and the use of final products/services are frequently not addressed. You should also ensure that you have a logical process for determining the significance or importance of your significant environmental impacts - your EMS should be managing your significant impacts.

7. Identify your legal and other requirements

Most organisations use some form of register to compile regulatory and other policy requirements. An important preparatory step is to consider the information sources to be used.

Auditors also seek your understanding of environmental law in order to demonstrate that you have been able to clearly determine whether it applies to you and how it applies to you. It is also worth considering some formal mechanism for reviewing and updating the legislation and for communicating the main provisions, as they apply, to those that need to know. Be mindful of the fact that your EMS auditors will review compliance with legal conditions (in Permits etc).

8. Complete your EMS development

Once you have a good understanding of where your business impacts the environment and its legal requirements it will be possible to define some pertinent environmental objectives and targets - with supporting programmes defining who, when and how the objects and targets will be achieved.

Be mindful that in the early stages of an EMS that it is possible to set investigations as targets (e.g. the business is unsure of its energy profile, and so the first step will be to obtain sound data - on which it will then be possible to set quantified targets). A sound foundation of understanding environmental impacts, legal requirements topped with a set of objectives that and targets that will results in continual improvement are the cornerstone of an EMS. From here, the remainder of the EMS should be logical (e.g. your Environmental Policy reflects your business, there is a logical description of the EMS and easy navigation, any documented procedures reflect key environmental impacts and legal requirements, you monitor and measure your key environmental impacts etc).

9. Implement your EMS

In reality implementation commences as soon as you have the commitment, but remember implementation is not one person's responsibility.

There will also be a need to ensure that everyone in the business receives some training and awareness - at least covering the basics of the EMS, where to find key information, the Environmental Policy, objective and targets and ideally key environmental impacts. The degree of this training and awareness will be dependent on the level of complexity and involvement of the target audience. A key and overlooked part of the implementation process is to ensure that you commence the internal audit process, which must be fully operational and effective before certification can be granted. Be mindful also that ISO 14001 requires "evaluations of compliance with legal and other requirements" and that most organisations use their internal audits to address this requirement. After a period of implementation, a management review should be conducted to review the current state of the EMS implementation and whether it is delivering its goals.

10. Go for certification

If you are conducting effective internal audits, they will give you a clear indication as to whether your business is ready for certification. Be aware that most certification bodies work on fairly long lead times and that a first time certification is a two-staged process; so forward planning and early dialogue is key.

For more information please do not hesitate to contact us.
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