



ISO14001:2015 Auditing Practices Group Guidance on

Improvement

10 Improvement

Requirements

10.1 General

The organization shall determine opportunities for improvement (see 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3) and implement necessary actions...

10.3 Continual improvement

The organization shall continually improve the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the environmental management system to enhance environmental performance.

Guidance

ISO 14001 uses the continual improvement with respect to the environmental management system. “Continual” indicates duration that occurs over a period of time, but with intervals of interruption. Hence the definition of continual improvement is “recurring activity to enhance performance”. The auditor should understand that there might be times where the organization is not actively engaged in improvement.

It is important for the auditor to remember that improvement and performance levels are set by the organization. The auditor should seek to determine if the organization has planned actions, including environmental objectives, which are aligned with the environmental policy commitment to “continual improvement of the environmental management system to enhance environmental performance”. It is up to the organization to balance the need for improving internal efficiency of the environmental management system and the need to advance environmental performance

Improvement is focused in three main areas:

Suitability – refers to how the environmental management system fits the organization, its Context

Adequacy – refers to whether the environmental management system meets the requirements of the ISO 14001 Standard and is implemented appropriately.

Effectiveness – refers to whether the environmental management system is achieving the desired results (i.e., its intended outcomes).

It should be emphasized that the requirement in ISO 14001 is for improvement of the effectiveness of the environmental management system. The auditor should seek to understand how the organization measures and evaluates the achievement of the environmental management system's intended outcomes. The intended outcomes of an ISO 14001 environmental management system include:

- enhancement of environmental performance;
- fulfilment of compliance obligations;
- achievement of environmental objectives.

(see guidance document on auditing intended outcomes for more information)

When auditing this requirement within ISO 14001:2015 consideration also has to be given to the other parts of the standard that may impact on an organization's ability to deliver environmental improvement, if the organization does not have the necessary leadership (clause 5 particularly 5.2) then any improvement processes put in place are going to fail to deliver, similarly if the organization fails to provide the necessary resources (clause 7.1) to ensure that the improvement process can be delivered, then this will lead to failure in the delivery of the planned improvements.

Failure to ensure that all this is in place could lead to nonconformity related to the improvement not being consistently implemented. Or effective implementation not being demonstrable (e.g. no or little reactivity to not achieving planned performance improvements).

Possible questions pertaining to Improvement

- Show me the process the organization uses to set the levels for improvement and performance?
- Show me the process the organization uses to improve their environmental management system?
- How is the organization's context considered when identifying opportunities to improve the environmental management system?
- Show me the process the organization uses to analyze its compliance obligations to identify opportunities to improve the environmental management system?
- What is the process used by the organization to determine when to change/modify their processes used to deliver on their compliance obligations?

- Show me how the organization has improved or attempted to improve their compliance assurance processes?
- How does the organization ensure that resources are made available to implement the processes that drive performance and system improvement activities?
- What processes are in place to enable persons doing work under the organization's control to contribute to continual improvement
- Does the management review process identify improvement opportunities?
- How does the organization utilize its performance data analysis process to determine improvement opportunities?
- What are the processes used by the organization to demonstrate that it has improved the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the environmental management system to enhance environmental performance?

For further information on the ISO 14001 Auditing Practices Group, please refer to the paper: Introduction to the ISO 14001 Auditing Practices Group
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<https://committee.iso.org/sites/tc207sc1/home/projects/published/iso-14001---environmental-manage/iso-14001-auditing-practices-gro.html>

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