Main changes in ISO 14001:2015

Strategic Environmental Management

There is an increased prominence of environmental management within the organization's strategic planning processes.   A new requirement to understand the organization's context has been incorporated to identify and leverage opportunities for the benefit of both the organization and the environment. Particular focus is on issues or changing circumstances related to the needs and expectations of interested parties (including regulatory requirements) and local, regional or global environmental conditions that can affect, or be affected by, the organization. Once identified as a priority, actions to mitigate adverse risk or exploit beneficial opportunities are integrated in the operational planning of the environmental management system.

Leadership

To ensure the success of the system, a new clause has been added that assigns specific responsibilities for those in leadership roles to promote environmental management within the organization.

Protecting the environment

The expectation on organizations has been expanded to commit to proactive initiatives to protect the environment from harm and degradation, consistent with the context of the organization. The revised text does not define 'protect the environment' but it notes that it can include prevention of pollution, sustainable resource use, climate change mitigation and adaptation, protection of biodiversity and ecosystems, etc.

Environmental performance

There is a shift in emphasis with regard to continual improvement, from improving the management system to improving environmental performance. Consistent with the organization's policy commitments the organization would, as applicable, reduce emissions, effluents and waste to levels set by the organization.

Lifecycle perspective

In addition to the current requirement to manage environmental aspects associated with procured goods and service, organizations will need to extend its control and influence to the environmental impacts associated with product design and development to address each stage of the life cycle, i.e. acquisition of raw materials, design, production, transportation/delivery, use, end-of-life treatment and final disposal. This does not imply a requirement to do a life cycle assessment.

Outsourced processes

Organizations need to control or influence outsourced processes.

Communication

The development of a communications strategy with equal emphasis on external and internal communications has been added. This includes a requirement on communicating consistent and reliable information, and establishing mechanisms for persons working under the organization's control to make suggestions on improving the environmental management system. The decision to communicate externally is retained by the organization but the decision needs to take into account information reporting required by regulatory agencies and the expectations of other interested parties.

Documentation

Reflecting the evolution of computer and cloud based systems for running management systems, the revision incorporates the term 'documented information', instead of 'documents' and 'records'. To align with ISO 9001, the organization will retain the flexibility to determine when 'procedures' are needed to ensure effective process control.

ISO common framework for management systems

It uses ISO new High Level Structure (HLS) for Management System Standards (MSS) which is a new common framework for ISO management system standards, which incorporate identical core text, and common terms with core definitions. The new framework is designed to benefit users implementing multiple ISO management system standards and be applicable to any management system standard. This allows compatibility across ISO management system standards while offering subject-specific flexibility.

For more information about ISO 14001:2015 and related standards, visit the ISO/TC 207/SC 1 website - https://committee.iso.org/tc207sc1