



ISO 14001 Certification – The Process

You have implemented your Environmental Management System (EMS) and let it run to see that it works, is delivering continual improvement and your objectives. Now you're ready to go for ISO 14001 certification but don't know what that involves. Here is a rundown on what to expect of the certification process.

Select your Certification Body

To get your EMS properly certified you need to choose a certification body, ideally one that is accredited to UKAS. UKAS oversees certification bodies, to ensure they deliver good services in a consistent manner.



Agree the scope and boundaries of the EMS and get a quote for the certification. Costs will reflect your EMS, depending on the size and complexity of your business, number of sites, employees etc. Once you've agreed and signed the contract, the audit process gets underway. An auditor will be selected with experience of your business sector.



Stage 1 Audit

The purpose of a Stage 1 audit is to assess your organisation's documented policies and procedures, and to identify any shortfalls prior to the Stage 2 audit.

The Stage 1 audit will typically consist of:

- Review of your EMS documentation to ensure they meet the requirements of the ISO 14001 standard
 - Such documents include Policy, EMS procedures, aspects & impacts, objectives & targets, audit reports, management review records etc
- Confirmation that all legal/technical requirements are identified and documented as necessary
- An evaluation as to your readiness to proceed with your stage 2 audit.

The auditor will compile a report showing findings (strengths and weaknesses) and agree with you an Audit Plan for Stage 2, including a date for the next visit.

Stage 2 Audit

While Stage 1 focusses on documentation, a Stage 2 audit examines your organisation and how your EMS is operating, gathering objective evidence against the requirements of the standard, according to the Audit Plan previously agreed.

Stage 2 activities will typically consist of:

- Opening and closing meetings
- Audits of all relevant activities and processes of the EMS, and key clauses of the standard
- Interviews with managers and staff
- Examination of records, documents and policies
- Site visits
- Discussions regarding any findings.

While every part of the EMS should be evaluated, it is not possible to look at every single activity or every item of documentation, thus a sampling regime is adopted (depending on quantities, risks, standard requirements etc).

Findings of the audit will be discussed with you and documented in an audit report. Concerns or weaknesses in the system are categorised as follows:

- A **major non-conformity** is the failure to address or meet a requirement of the standard. Major non-conformities must be rectified before certification can be approved.
- A **minor non-conformity** normally occurs when standard requirements appear to have been met, but there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate full compliance. These don't necessarily have to be rectified before certification approval, so could be cleared at the next visit.
- **Observations & opportunities for improvement** - these relate to existing conditions which may need clarification, further investigation or could improve the EMS. They do not affect certification.



Don't be overly concerned if non-conformities are raised (especially minor ones) as they are common and it's good to make use of the auditor's skills and experience to identify improvements.

Should major non-conformities be raised, these must be cleared before a recommendation for certification can be made. A revisit may be required to verify the corrective action taken. You have up to three months to address these.

A three year Audit Plan will be agreed at Stage 2, so you can plan for the next visit.

Certification

Following your Stage 2 audit, the auditor's report is reviewed by the certification body, to ensure the audits have been completed correctly, and the findings and result are agreed. On satisfactory completion of these checks, your ISO 14001 certificate will be issued. You may choose to use the ISO 14001 logo provided by your certification body.

Surveillance Visits & Recertification

Certification to ISO 14001 covers a three-year period. The auditor will return to conduct surveillance visits at least once each year (the first of which is typically within 6 months). At the end of the three years, a full audit will be required before recommendation for recertification can be made.

Integrated systems

Many companies run integrated management systems, covering more than one issue: environment, H&S, quality, information security etc. It is important to get an auditor that understands all of these issues. Indeed even if your EMS just covers one issue, ensure that your auditor is suitably experienced in

environmental matters - it is common that quality or H&S auditors “also cover environment” (they may not be as proficient as in their specialist subjects).

ISO 14001:2015

A new version of ISO 14001 was released in late 2015 and must be implemented by September 2018.

There are some [significant changes](#) so it is best to get a Gap Analysis to identify where your existing system needs attention.

Top Tips to prepare for certification audits

- Make sure your documentation is complete, up-to-date and relevant.
- Ensure you've covered all the stages / activities required by ISO 14001 – including risks, compliance evaluation, audits and the Management Review.
- Brief key personnel so they know what to expect from the auditor's visit, the sorts of things they'll be asking about and what evidence they'll want to see.
- Get your staff involved, it's a great opportunity to further promote the EMS and your achievements.
- Don't panic – you may not have been audited before, but auditors don't bite! Try to enjoy it and get the most benefit from the process.



I often assist clients with their certification audits. I know what the auditors are looking for & in how much detail. I can answer their questions & guide staff & managers through the whole process. Makes it a little less daunting.

About ESHCon - Anya Ledwith (CEnv)

I am an experienced business adviser and auditor, with over 20 years of leadership in the field of environmental management. A Chartered Environmentalist, a Registered Environmental Auditor & a Lead ESOS Assessor, it is *my mission is to make environmental management the business norm*. With expert advice and a pragmatic approach, I make it easy for clients to find improvements and see the commercial benefit. Away from work, I am the Chairman of Gatwick Diamond Business and volunteer for the Sussex Community Foundation. For adventure, I rode a classic motorcycle across the Himalayas.

Do Get in Touch to discuss your needs & find out how I can help



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