

Significant changes to the third revision of ISO 14001 (Part 1 of a 6 part series)

One of the flagship management system standards of the International Organisation for Standardisation, the environmental management system standard (ISO 14001) that was published in 2004 is currently being reviewed and revised.

South Africa is represented as a member with voting status at the international working group tasked with generating the third revision that is expected to be published in 2015.

The current 2004 version is the second edition of this standard. The ISO 14001 standard was first published in 1996. The second revision in 2004 was limited to editorial alignment between the quality management system standard (ISO 9001) and ISO 14001. No new text and requirements were added to the second revision.

The third revision of ISO 14001 is scheduled to be published in 2015, nineteen years after the first edition was published, while it is expected to be in use until 2025. It is imperative that the second revision of the ISO 14001 is thoroughly revised and updated to be aligned with developments in the environmental management field since the mid 1990's.

The current revision process was preceded by an international process to define what was called the "future challenges" of ISO 14001. The purpose of the future challenges process was to identify and define exactly how and to what extent a sixteen year old standard should be aligned with current and reasonably foreseeable future, developments in the field of environmental management.

Another process also preceded the third revision of the standard. It is generally referred to as the High Level Structure (HLS) for Management System standards with common text and core definitions. The purpose of the HLS is to provide a single framework with common text, core definitions and a predetermined structure for all management system standards. This means that all ISO-based management system standards will have a similar look and feel, while generic requirements will be exactly the same for all. Sector specific work teams may not deviate from this HLS framework, but they may add sector specific requirements.

The ISO 14001 standard is the first standard to transition to the HLS format, while a number of new management system standards have adopted the HLS framework from the outset.

With powerful forces such as HLS and FC directing the work of the international work group tasked to generate and issue the 2015 version of the standard, significant changes to ISO 14001, as we have known it since 1996, are imminent. The new standard will have a significant impact on organisations that have an environmental management system in place as well as those that are in the process of developing and implementing one.

The next two editions of the CEM newsletter will have news on the impacts of the FC and HLS processes on the new version of the standard and an indication what changes can be expected.