

ISO 14001: 2026

Key Changes



ENVIRONMENTAL
STRATEGIES

ESTABLISHED 1998

Please note the information in this document relates to the published Draft International Standard (DIS). A second update will be issued following the publication of the Final Draft (expected March 2026), should any significant changes occur contrary to the information provided in this update.

WHY IS ISO 14001 BEING UPDATED?

The new version of ISO 14001 is expected overall to enhance climate action and environmental resilience across organisations. The new Standard will better support consistency and harmonise processes across ISO Standards, as such aligning itself more closely with ISO 9001 for example. Updates to the Standard strengthen change management processes throughout businesses and their supply chain, allowing for greater supply chain due diligence. Following this, the scope of the EMS is extended to encompass a wider life-cycle perspective including upstream design of products and services, and downstream disposal or impact of services. Risk-based thinking will also become a critical factor across the scope of the EMS.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

GENERAL

There are general terminology changes within ISO 14001:2026. These include but are not limited to: replacing 'fulfilment' of compliance obligations with 'meeting', and the term 'result' being used to describe the output of a process e.g. Management Review.

Greater emphasis also placed on natural resource and ecosystem conservation, reflecting broader environmental areas of concern. There is an expectation that top management will shape environmental culture, not just oversee compliance.

CHANGES WITHIN CLAUSES

CLAUSES 4.1 AND 4.2 : REFERENCES TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

- Explicit reference to environmental conditions such as climate change and pollution must be considered in external issues.
- Encouragement of a deeper consideration of environmental factors in understanding the business context, risks, opportunities and aspects.
- Introduces life-cycle perspective in the consideration of the above to ensure that upstream and downstream processes that a business may control or influence are not overlooked.
- Expands the focus of stakeholder requirements from February 2024, to include the consideration that stakeholders may have expectations relating to environmental conditions.
- These requirements must be reviewed by the organisation.

CLAUSE 5 : LEADERSHIP

Updates to Clause 5 place emphasis on more holistic and ethical leadership, considering full accountability and a drive for sustainable development. This is anticipated to require leadership to have a more visible role in embedding sustainability into business operations.

CLAUSE 6.1: RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Clause 6.1 has been restructured as follows to improve clarity:

- Clause 6.1.1 (General) is now moved to 6.1.4, focusing on identification of risks and opportunities.
- Clause 6.1.2 requires identification of emergency situations as a separate requirement from abnormal conditions.
- Clause 6.1.5 covers the requirements of formerly Clause 6.1.4 (Planning Action).

CLAUSE 6.3: CHANGE MANAGEMENT

A new clause (6.3) on change management is one of the main updates to the 2026 Standard and is similar in approach to that of ISO 9001. It establishes a structured approach in management of environmental change which addresses regulatory changes, operational adjustments and technological or process shifts.

CLAUSE 7: SUPPORT

There are no updates made to Clause 7 that will have significant operational changes for businesses. However, some technical changes in terminology have been made, that businesses should ensure alignment with within their EMS documents. All references made to 'maintaining' documented evidence are now stated as 'available' as documented evidence.

CLAUSE 8 : OPERATIONS

As reflected in other changes, Clause 8 requires the embedding of a life-cycle perspective across operational controls. This includes a greater visibility across the supply chain sustainability with a change from 'outsourced process' to control of "externally provided processes, products and services". Contractors and suppliers are to be considered within the scope of operational control.

Another key change within Clause 8 includes the consideration of emergency situations determined in the revised clause 6.1.2 (above), not just in the environmental aspects. This intends to ensure that no emergency situation may be overlooked.

CLAUSE 9.2: INTERNAL AUDIT

The effectiveness of the management system is now emphasised across the entirety of Clause 9 and is detailed as such in an introductory sentence. Additionally, each internal audit must now have defined objectives as well as scope and criteria.

CLAUSE 9.3: MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Clause 9.3 has been restructured into three main parts: inputs, process and results. The information requirements of the management review are now necessary requirements, and 'shall' be included to improve structure and traceability across the process.

CLAUSE 10: IMPROVEMENT

Clause 10.1 (General) has now been removed and amalgamated into Clauses previously 10.2 and 10.3. The intention of this is to streamline the approach taken to non-conformities and corrective action through reinforcing root cause analysis and the link between audit findings and continual improvement.

TRANSITION

It is currently anticipated that businesses will have a three-year transition period to ISO 14001:2026. However, early transition is encouraged upon release of the FDIS or Final Draft International Standard.

Preparation for transition may include aligning existing documentation with the updated terminology and phrasing; and ensuring procedures reflect revised clause numbering.

Please do get in touch with us to chat through any queries, and how we can help you meet the requirements of this new Standard.