

ISO 14001: 2026

Key Changes following Final Publication



ENVIRONMENTAL
STRATEGIES

ESTABLISHED 1998

ISO 14001:2026 was released 15th April 2026 and finalised the changes proposed in the draft versions published in 2025. Following our previous update relating to the Draft International Standard (DIS), please see this latest brief sharing the final amendments included in the new ISO 14001 Standard, and what this means for your management system.

OVERVIEW

ISO 14001:2026 reflects a global response to evolving environmental challenges, strengthens organisational resilience and provides a clearer framework for organisations to embed environmental considerations across their wider business strategy.

The new Standard is designed to enable organisations to anticipate change and adapt accordingly, in a context of dynamic environmental conditions, rising stakeholder expectations and increasingly stringent environmental legislation. Leadership will be expected to pioneer this new approach, with increased accountability in supporting roles across all functions of the organisation.

The changes are less extensive than those initially proposed in the DIS, representing a refinement of existing requirements (with some new additions) rather than a fundamental change.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

TERMINOLOGY

Key terminology changes to be aware of include:

- Documented information must now be made **available** rather than maintained where indicated across the clauses of the Standard. This change emphasises accessibility and usability of the information when required, rather than simply storing documents.
- Compliance and other obligations must be **met** rather than fulfilled, making more explicit expectation of evidence and the ongoing nature of compliance.
- The term **'result'** is to be used when referring to the output of a process e.g. Management review resulting in a more outcome-focused outlook.

CHANGES WITHIN CLAUSES

CLAUSE 4 : REFERENCES TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS AND LIFE-CYCLE PERSPECTIVE

- Explicit reference to environmental conditions such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity, ecosystem health and availability of natural resources must be considered in external issues.
- Organisations must consider which **environmental conditions** affect the organisation, and are affected by the organisation.
- Expectation of a greater consideration of the **life-cycle perspective** when setting the scope of the EMS. The scope should consider in more detail, the level of control and influence that the organisation has over the life-cycle of its activities, products and services.
- Organisations should acknowledge that the needs and expectations of interested parties may relate to the above identified **environmental conditions** and may also relate to Clause 6.1.3 (Compliance Obligations).
- It should be determined that the needs and expectations that become compliance obligations will be **addressed through the EMS**.

CLAUSE 5 : LEADERSHIP

Amongst their duties defined in the previous version of the Standard, top management are now expected to **provide support to all other roles relevant to the EMS** (not just management roles). In providing more holistic EMS support across business functions top management are able to become more involved and accountable in embedding the EMS throughout the wider business strategy.

CLAUSE 6: PLANNING

Clause 6.1 has been restructured as follows to improve clarity and flow, with little impact on the overall requirements:

- 6.1.1 - General
- 6.1.2 - Environmental aspects
- 6.1.3 - Compliance obligations
- 6.1.4 - Risks and opportunities
- 6.1.5 - Planning action

Minor amendments to be aware of are:

- **Potential abnormal and emergency situations** must be explicitly identified in the aspects.
- Improved clarity on what is to be expected in the consideration of the **life-cycle perspective** within the aspects.
- Added reference to new Clause 6.3 (below)
- Minor wording changes to 6.1.5 that strengthen planning action requirements with the integration of actions into the EMS and wider business processes.

NEW CLAUSE 6.3: PLANNING OF CHANGES

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 to management of environmental change which addresses regulatory changes, operational adjustments and technological or process shifts. Change must be controlled to ensure intended environmental outcomes are achieved, and those that are unintended may be mitigated. Management of Change should be embedded across all EMS and wider business processes, including those changes arising from external sources.

CLAUSE 7: SUPPORT

See section entitled ‘terminology’ for an overview of amendments made to Clause 7. Organisations should ensure alignment with new terminology within their EMS documents and procedures.

CLAUSE 8 : OPERATIONS

Consideration of the life-cycle perspective in Clause 8 now includes greater visibility across the supply chain sustainability beyond just the supply of products. A change from ‘outsourced process’ to control of “**externally provided processes, products and services**” reinforces this notion, with organisations required to determine their level of control or influence over these.

Clause 8 also adds that **emergency situations** will be identified when considering risks and opportunities, not just aspects.

CLAUSE 9: PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

The effectiveness of the management system is now emphasised across the entirety of Clause 9 and is detailed in a new introductory sentence. Focus shifts from monitoring to **evaluating the effectiveness** of the EMS, and environmental performance. Additionally, each internal audit must now have **defined objectives** as well as scope and criteria.

Clause 9.3 has been restructured into three main parts: **inputs, process and results**; reinforcing the required framework of the management review. The information requirements of the management review are now more definitive, and ‘shall’ be included, rather than considered 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. There is minimal operational impact to the changes made.

TRANSITION

Organisations will have until April 2029 (a three-year transition period) to align with ISO 14001:2026. However planning for an early transition is recommended and may include:

- reading the updated guidance in Annex A of the Standard
- conducting a gap analysis between your existing system and the new requirements,
- aligning terminology within your documents and processes,
- raising awareness of upcoming changes throughout your organisation,
- implementing aspects of the new standard into your current internal audit programme to ease the transition.

At ESL, we are here to make this transition as smooth as possible. Please feel free to get in touch to discuss how we can best support your organisation in the transition to ISO 14001: 2026.