



a practical guide

for SMEs

ISO 14001:2015

Environmental management systems



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Views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of ISO.

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Foreword

Awareness of environmental problems is growing in most countries and it is believed that current development patterns cannot be sustained in the long term. Governments are increasingly enacting legislation aimed at protecting the environment, and customers are requiring their suppliers to incorporate best practices and demonstrate compliance with environmental requirements.

The publication of the ISO 14001 standard for environmental management systems (EMS) has proved to be very successful, as it is now implemented in more than 159 countries and has provided organizations with a powerful management tool to improve their environmental performance. More than 324 000 organizations have been certified worldwide against ISO 14001 at the end of 2014, which is an increase of 7 % compared to 2013. Many companies have improved their operations by reducing the adverse impact their activities, processes, products and services have on the environment using a systematic approach embodied in ISO 14001.

The benefits of positively addressing environmental issues therefore not only cover the protection of the environment, but are also linked to business performance and profitability. These can include improving the corporate image, enhancing access to export markets, and improving relationships with customers, regulators, the public and other stakeholders, etc.

One major advantage of implementing ISO 14001 is that it can be done in an organization of any size or type, since the requirements of an EMS are the same for all — although the manner of implementing one will vary according to the size and activity of the organization.

Experience shows that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can implement an effective EMS and realize a variety of benefits. However, EMS implementation can present some challenges. This guide aims to help organizations understand the requirements for an environment management system and for them to identify areas for improvement. It will be of value in preparing the organization for third party certification of its EMS should the organization wish to do so.

We hope that this revised guide to help achieve the benefits of ISO 14001:2015 will be of practical use to small businesses whatever their activity and wherever they may be, but especially in developing countries and economies in transition.



Nicolas Fleury
Acting Secretary-General
ISO

Introduction

This guide guides the user through the establishment of an environmental management system (EMS), in accordance with the requirements specified in ISO 14001:2015, *Environmental management systems — Requirements with guidance for use*.

There are many benefits to implementing an EMS. These include a potential for:

- improved control and management of emissions, effluents and wastes;
- avoidance and safe handling of hazardous or potentially polluting materials;
- reduction in generated wastes;
- energy efficiency improvements and cost savings;
- conservation of natural resources, including water, land and precious minerals;
- a comprehensive approach to satisfying legal and other requirements;
- operational efficiency and cost savings;
- pursuing environmental initiatives that are aligned with business priorities.

Other benefits can include increased profitability, better access to markets and improved relationships with stakeholders (e.g. customers, regulators, investors, insurers, neighbours). In some cases it may be of further value to organizations and their stakeholders to have the EMS assessed for conformity in order to demonstrate that it meets the requirements of ISO 14001:2015¹⁾.

This guide is aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), both in developed, transitioning economy and developing countries, but can be used by an organization of any size. It provides an overview of the ISO 14001:2015 requirements and promotes the guidance offered in ISO 14004:2016, *Environmental management systems — General guidelines on implementation*. It seeks to provide practical help that assists organizations in establishing an EMS that can address its particular needs.

1) Section 10, *Demonstrating conformity*, describes the various options for assessing and demonstrating conformity to ISO 14001.

The guide has twelve sections, seven of which cover a particular stage in the EMS implementation process. Each of these sections provides an explanation of the relevant requirement(s), as well as guidance on how to get started, helpful implementation techniques, examples and a self-assessment checklist to verify conformance. Other sections provide useful information on the environmental management system model, guidance on integrating management systems, conformity assessment options and additional reference materials. A fictional case study is also included. The information included in this guide, however, should not be misconstrued as modifying or adding to the ISO 14001 requirements.

ISO 14001:2015 and other management system standards like ISO 9001:2015, *Quality management systems — Requirements*, are closely related. The structures are identical and several elements of these two management systems contain the same requirements. However, there are also significant technical differences. If an organization has either implemented or is already certified to any of the ISO management system standards such as ISO 9001, it should have in place many of the components common to most management systems, for example, context of the organization, competence, documented information, internal audit, nonconformity and corrective action, to name a few. The task for organizations wishing to adapt their management system to address environmental issues will be to expand the scope of these common components, and address the remaining environment-specific requirements in ISO 14001:2015.

Since this guide does not include the text of ISO 14001:2015, users are recommended to obtain a copy from their national standards body or from ISO, either directly via sales@iso.org or via the Internet from www.iso.org.

1 Pursuing an environmental management system

1.1 Environmental management

Societal expectations for sustainable development continue to evolve due to growing pressures on the environment from pollution, natural resource scarcities, and global warming. Governments responded with increasingly stringent legislation. Organizations answered back by controlling their environmental impacts, primarily through pollution prevention and managing their waste streams. More recently, emphasis and positive efforts toward conserving natural resources and reducing use of fossil fuels for energy generation have been made. But expectations continue to mount for organizations to be more proactive in protecting the environment from harm and degradation.

Environmental management encompasses an organizations' efforts to control its interaction with and effect on the environment in order to minimize adverse environmental impacts and leverage positive environmental impacts. It is a core responsibility of all organizations. Stakeholder groups exerting pressure and holding organizations accountable for their environmental footprint is increasing: these stakeholders include board of directors, insurance companies, investors, customers, community members, regulators, and employees. Nongovernmental organizations are extending these pressures, holding countries, sectors and indeed organizations accountable for reducing pollutants.

An environmental management system (EMS) is an approach used by organizations since the 1990s to manage its interactions with the environment in a planned and systematic way. It comprises a comprehensive set of processes

that an organization uses to establish and execute its policies and objectives. These processes include organizational structure, roles and responsibilities, planning, operations and performance evaluation. When implemented in unison, this system of processes focuses on making incremental improvement over time.

ISO 14001 provides such a framework for continual improvement of environmental management. It incorporates proven techniques implemented worldwide, and is internationally accepted. It is a voluntary framework which an organization chooses freely to undertake. It does not contain product specifications nor does it set requirements for performance outcomes. Organizations of any size or type, whether located in a developed, transition or developing country, can set for themselves environmental performance goals and use ISO 14001 to achieve those goals.

Most organizations that have implemented ISO 14001 have attested to significant improvement in minimizing wastes, conserving energy and improving their compliance status. These gains have been accomplished while improving operational efficiency and saving money. The most critical success factors include:

- leadership and commitment by top management,
- selection of environmental initiatives that address significant environmental impacts and are aligned with other business priorities, particularly when they yield a competitive advantage, and
- developing a proactive environmental culture throughout all levels and functions of the organization.

A summary of the key components of an environmental management system based on ISO 14001:2015 is provided in [Table 1](#). Once fully implemented, an organization is on its way to contributing to the “environmental pillar” of sustainability.

Table 1 — Key components of ISO 14001:2015

Key concepts in ISO 14001:2015		
PLAN	1.	Understand the organization and its context, including environmental conditions.
	2.	Understand the needs and expectations of interested parties and determine which of those the organization will comply with.
	3.	Determine the scope (i.e. boundaries and applicability) of the EMS.
	4.	Establish and implement the environmental management system.
	5.	Garner leadership commitment from top management.
	6.	Establish an environmental policy.
	7.	Assign responsibilities and authorities for relevant roles.
	8.	Identify environmental aspects and associated environmental impacts, considering the product/service life cycle.
	9.	Determine the applicability of its compliance obligations, and address them within the EMS.
	10.	Determine the priority risks and opportunities to the intended outcomes of the EMS, including those related to significant environmental aspects, compliance obligations and other issues and requirements.
	11.	Plan to take actions to address significant environmental aspects, compliance obligations and other priority risks and opportunities.
	12.	Plan how to integrate the actions into its business processes and how to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions.
	13.	Establish one or more environmental objectives and a plan to achieve them, including indicators for monitoring progress.
DO	1.	Provide the resources required to implement and maintain the EMS.
	2.	Determine the skills and knowledge needed for the EMS, then obtain the necessary competence, including any required training.
	3.	Raise awareness of the EMS.
	4.	Establish, implement and maintain the processes needed for internal and external communications.
	5.	Create, update and control documented information needed for EMS effectiveness and required by ISO 14001.
	6.	Plan, implement, and control operations and processes needed to meet EMS requirements.
	7.	Prepare for and respond to emergency situations.

Key concepts in ISO 14001:2015		
CHECK	1.	Monitor, measure, analyse, and evaluate environmental performance.
	2.	Evaluate adherence to compliance obligations.
	3.	Conduct periodic internal EMS audits.
	4.	Review the EMS to ensure continuing suitability, adequacy and effectiveness.
ACT	1.	Make improvements by taking action to achieve the EMS intended outcomes.
	2.	Take action to deal with nonconformity and prevent its recurrence.
	3.	Take action to continually improve the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the EMS, focusing on elements that enhance environmental performance.

1.2 The Plan-Do-Check-Act model and ISO 14001

Successful organizations have found they can consistently achieve their strategic goals if they manage their business in a systematic manner. The systematic methods used may vary in detail, but typically include the following elements:

- planning
- operating and controlling
- monitoring and reviewing
- acting to improve.

The Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) model provides an ongoing, iterative process that leads to continual process improvement. It is a proven methodology that enables an organization to establish policy commitments and take actions in a systematic manner to realize those commitments. This model is the underlying approach used in ISO 14001. It is a process that can be applied to the EMS as a whole and to each of its individual elements to continually improve environmental performance.

[Figure 1](#) depicts the PDCA model when applied to the overall EMS. For demonstration purposes, its application to the single element, Competence, is illustrated in [Figure 2](#).

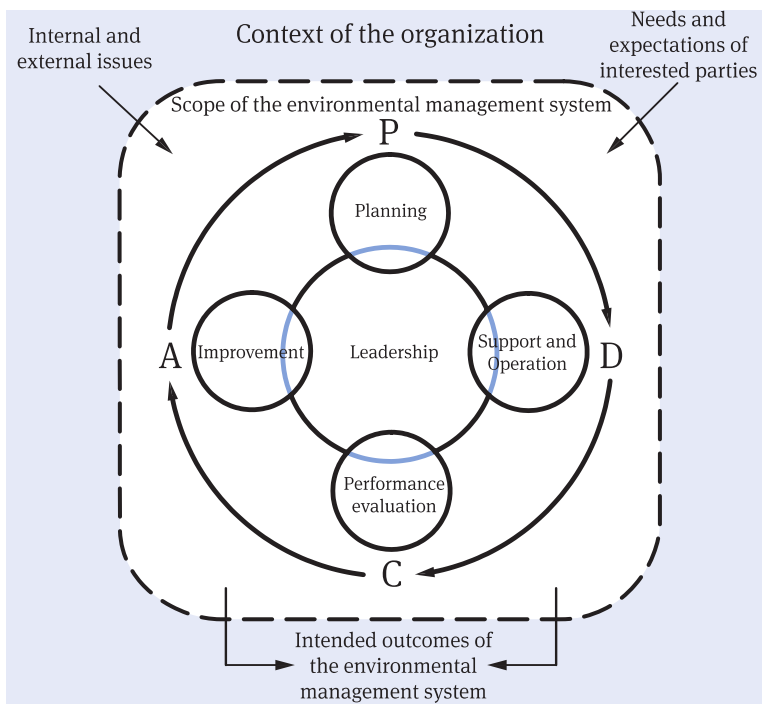


Figure 1 — PDCA model applied to an EMS

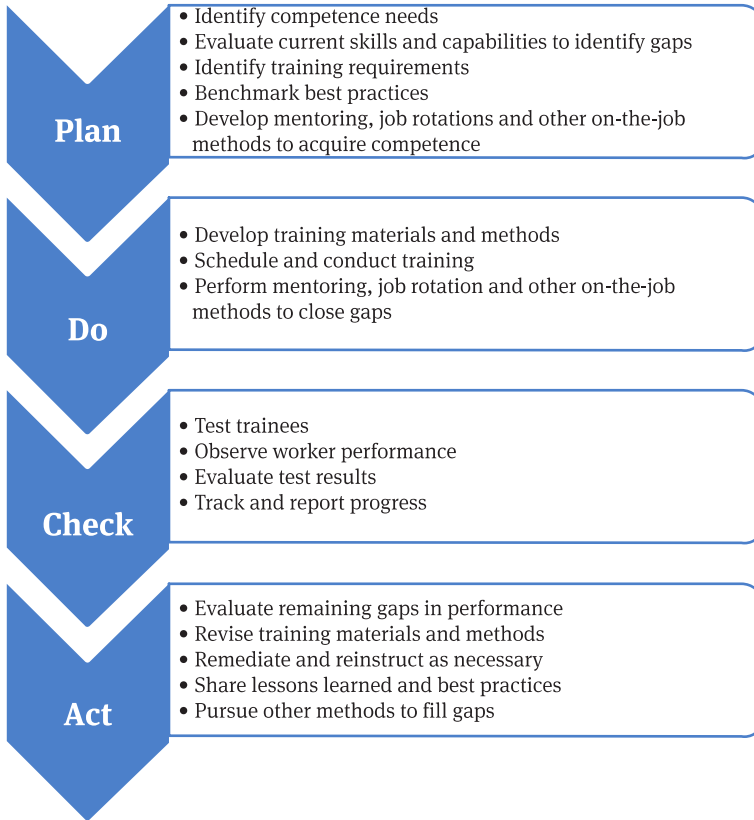


Figure 2 — PDCA applied to a single EMS element, Competence

1.3 What's new in the 2015 version of ISO 14001?

The launch of the ISO 14001 revision commenced in early 2012. Two drivers for the revision were:

- 1) New rules for ISO management system standards that required a common structure, a core set of requirements, and common terms and core definitions²⁾.

2) ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1, Consolidated ISO Supplement — Procedures specific to ISO, Annex SL.

- 2) Recommendations identified by TC 207/SC 1 members who studied the challenges associated with EMS implementation, including the evolving stakeholder expectations and advancements in management practices, since ISO 14001 was first published in 1996 ³⁾.

In addition, user feedback from over 5000 organizations provided valuable input on the ISO 14001 revision ⁴⁾. The key changes are described below.

Strategic environmental management — A new requirement to understand the organization's context has been incorporated to identify and leverage strategic opportunities for the benefit of both the organization and the environment. Opportunities can arise from issues or changing circumstances related to the organization. Particular focus is on local, regional or global environmental conditions that can affect, or be affected by, the organization, and the associated relevant needs and expectations of interested parties (including regulatory requirements).

Risk-based thinking — Once the strategic issues (described above) are identified, the organization decides which ones are a priority to address in its environmental management system based on the importance to mitigate the adverse effects or value of leveraging the beneficial effects on the organization. The risk-based thinking related to the assessment of environmental aspects associated with an organization's activities, products and services are retained in the 2015 version of the standard.

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 — Organizations are expected to make an environmental policy commitment to proactively protect the environment from harm and degradation. This commitment includes prevention of pollution initiatives, and can also include other areas that are relevant to its context,

3) ISO/TC 207/SC 1, Future challenges Study group N 9, Final report on the future challenges of EMS and ISO 14001, 2010.

4) TC 207/SC 1 N1016, ISO 14001 Continual Improvement Survey 2013 - Final Reports and Results, 2013.

such as sustainable resource use, climate change mitigation and adaptation, protection of biodiversity and ecosystems, etc.

Environmental performance — In addition to a new requirement to implement improvement opportunities that support achievement of intended outcomes, emphasis is placed on focusing continual improvement efforts on the management system elements that drive improved environmental performance, such as continually improving operational controls to reduce emissions, effluents and waste to target levels set by top management.

Life cycle thinking — In addition to managing environmental aspects associated with its procured goods and services and its production processes, organizations will need to consider if it can apply controls or influence to the management of environmental aspects associated with product design, transportation, use, end-of-life treatment or final disposal.

Communication — The development of a communications process with equal emphasis on external and internal communications has been added.

Evaluation of effectiveness — The need to evaluate the effectiveness of the EMS has been expanded from the requirement in 2004. Previously, only the effectiveness of corrective and preventive action and the effectiveness of the EMS (during management review) had to be evaluated. In the 2015 version, the following additional requirements are related to the effectiveness of the EMS:

- the leadership takes responsibility for the effectiveness of the EMS;
- reviewing the effectiveness of actions planned to address risks and opportunities;
- evaluating the effectiveness of competence training actions;
- ensuring staff understands their role in achieving the effectiveness of the EMS; and
- evaluating the effectiveness of the EMS.

In all cases, an organization can use the performance evaluation elements of ISO 14001 to evaluate effectiveness (i.e. monitoring and measuring, evaluation of compliance, internal audit and management review).

Intended outcomes — A new concept in the 2015 standard that represents the overall result that an EMS intends to achieve. The following three intended outcomes are specified, but organizations may identify additional ones:

- enhancement of environmental performance,
- fulfilment of compliance obligations, and
- achievement of environmental objectives.

Analysis and evaluation — Although previously implicit in the 2004 version, the 2015 version contains an explicit requirement to analyse and evaluate monitoring and measurement results, and to evaluate environmental performance. Further, there is increased emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness of specific actions taken and EMS effectiveness overall.

1.4 Drivers for a Small or Medium size Enterprise (SME)

An EMS provides value for all organizations but in particular it can help SMEs. Benefits can be summarized in the following categories:

- 1) Eliminates, minimizes and mitigates the environmental impacts associated with products and services offered by the organization.
- 2) Cuts costs and increases profits by preventing pollution and protecting the environment.
- 3) Creates a competitive advantage by providing products and services with lower environmental impact.
- 4) Drives growth by opening up new customers and export markets for products and services that meet ISO 14001 conformance requirements.
- 5) Enhances credibility with external interested parties and secures customer confidence.
- 6) Streamlines business processes and increases operational efficiency by focusing on continual improvement.
- 7) Helps the organization identify and comply with applicable legal and other requirements.

Each organization has the flexibility and autonomy to decide the level of detail and complexity of an EMS, the extent of documented information and the resources devoted to it. The decisions can be based on a number of factors,

such as the scope of the system, the size of an organization and the nature of its activities, products and services. This is particularly important for smaller organizations.

1.5 Using this guide

This guide provides guidance on ISO 14001:2015 requirements and how to augment an organization's existing processes for managing its environmental responsibilities to conform to ISO 14001. It can be used by organizations of all sizes and types regardless of the nature of their activities. ISO 14001 can be implemented in whole or in part to systematically improve environment management practices.

This guide covers each of the ISO 14001 clauses in the standard. A short explanation of its importance is given. Key terms are defined. The requirements are explained in layman's terms, as much as possible, with examples, tools and templates to illustrate some implementation methods. Helpful hints and special considerations collected from experienced implementers are provided. Tips for building on existing processes are given. Documentation and communication requirements are highlighted, as well as important linkages to other elements. These linkages represent the other clauses that have related requirements. An overview of this guides' structure is provided below.

Pursuing an environmental management system

This section gives an overview of what an ISO 14001 environmental management system is and how it has benefited organizations, including SMEs. Suggestions on how to start the journey of implementing an EMS are given.

**Understanding
the organization's context**

**Setting the direction for
the EMS**

**Determining risks and
opportunities**

**Establishing EMS support
processes**

**Maintaining control of EMS
processes**

Evaluating EMS performance

**Improving the EMS and
environmental performance**

These sections provide guidance to help readers understand ISO 14001 requirements, together with examples and suggestions of how these requirements could be met.

**Integrating other
management systems**

This section gives guidance and tips for implementing multiple management systems each having a different technical discipline, such as quality management, occupational safety and health, food safety or others.

Conformity assessment

This section gives the options available to organizations wishing to demonstrate conformity to ISO 14001. The four methods are explained and a detailed description of third party certification process is provided.

Case study

This section provides an EMS implementation case study for a small fictitious manufacturing organization.

Finding more information

This section provides references to sources of information which the reader might find useful.



1.6 Getting started

Whether setting out to implement an ISO 14001 conforming EMS for the first time, or upgrading an existing EMS to meet the 2015 revision requirements, some preliminary planning steps are recommended, see [Figure 3](#).

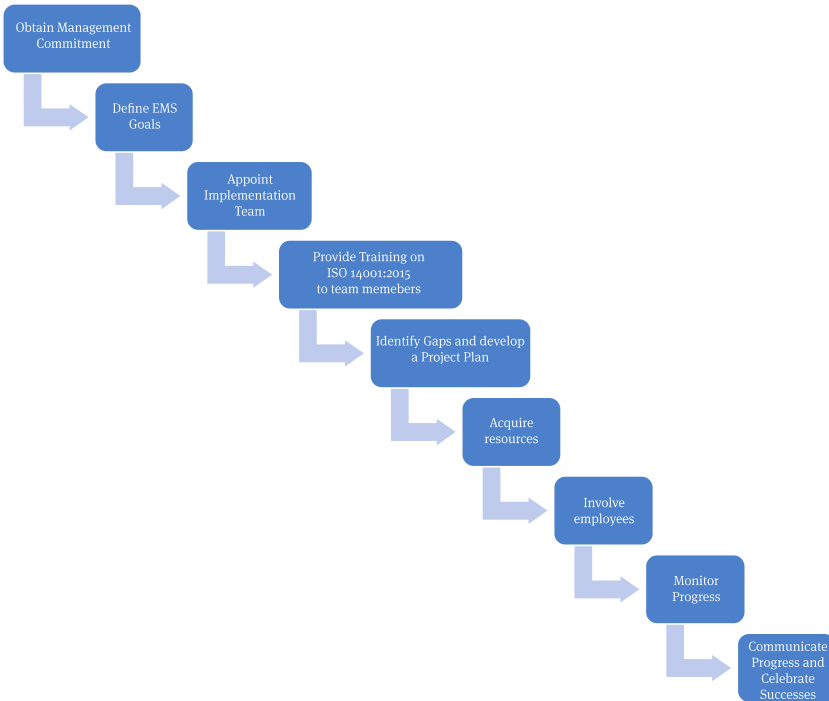


Figure 3 — Planning for an EMS

2 Understanding the organization's context

Before setting out to establish an EMS, a strategic understanding of the important factors that will affect the design and focus areas is needed. Each organization is unique and needs to identify what it plans to address and achieve so that the EMS brings value to the organization. ISO 14001 contains four clauses related to this effort:

- Organizational context
- Interested party needs and expectations
- Decision on the scope of the EMS
- Overarching EMS requirements

2.1 External and internal issues important to the EMS (ISO 14001:2015, Clause 4.1)

The organizational context is akin to an honest and objective situational analysis of the organization's environmental practices. It looks internally and externally at factors that concern the organization's environmental responsibilities and can, in part, affect its success. This situational analysis provides the “scene-setting” for determining issues that present risks and opportunities that need to be addressed in the EMS. It does not require a detailed analysis of these issues, but it does require a conceptual understanding of the potential adverse or beneficial effect these issues can have. It is important that the organization's leaders are involved in this analysis.

2.1.1 Getting started

2.1.1.1 Taking stock of your current state

Whether it is formal or informal, all organizations do some type of business planning and goal setting. They evaluate how the business is doing and what they need to do differently to increase customers or improve their operations. Whatever process is used, it can be expanded in scope to incorporate the evaluation of issues that pertain to environment management.

Sources of information

- Mission and vision statements
- Strategic plans
- Historical performance data
- Information on local and regional environmental conditions
- Legal requirements
- Customer requirements
- Benchmarking
- Best practices

2.1.1.2 Why is organizational context important?

Issues are important topics for the organization, problems for debate and discussion, or changing circumstances that affect the organization's ability to achieve the goals it sets for itself. These issues can include the organization's strengths, its weaknesses, or changes occurring either within its operations (e.g. introduction of new product lines or activities) or externally (e.g. new stakeholder requirements).

Some of these issues can affect the organization positively by presenting opportunities that can be leveraged, or negatively by posing threats that need to be addressed to prevent potential harm. In terms of environmental management, the issues that are most relevant are those that either help or hinder the

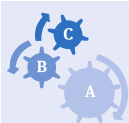
organization's ability to achieve the strategic goals of its EMS. ISO 14001 refers to the strategic goals of an EMS as “intended outcomes”, which include:

- improving its environmental performance,
- meeting its compliance obligations, and
- achieving its environmental objectives.

Organizations may set additional intended outcomes for its EMS, but these are the minimum required for any EMS.

The intent is to gain an objective picture of where the organization stands with respect to how it is managing its operations in balance with its environmental responsibilities. It starts with gathering facts and understanding relevant trends about external and internal pressures and success factors that have affected it in the past or likely to affect its future. Since this is an EMS, particular focus is on environmental conditions — how they can affect, or be affected by, an organization. However, this is not intended to be a voluminous and detailed data collection activity, but an opportunity to reflect on the “bigger picture” issues facing the organization.

By discussing and debating the relevance of these factors on the organization's goals and the intended outcomes of its EMS, the management team can identify which are likely to affect the organization, both long-term and within the current planning period. Focus on the factors that will contribute positively to the success of the business and to achieving the outcomes expected from the EMS.



Key linkages

- Interested parties
- Risks and opportunities
- Environmental aspects
- Compliance obligations
- Environmental objectives
- Management review
- Continual improvement



Environmental conditions

An “environmental condition” is the state or characteristic of the air, water, land, flora or fauna at a certain point in time. It can be described in terms of biodiversity, ecosystems, climate or other characteristics. It can be viewed locally, regionally, nationally or globally, over time or related to a specific event, such as a volcano eruption.

Organizations can affect the environmental condition through the emissions, wastes and wastewater that is generated by its operations, and by the raw materials that go into its products, aka its environmental aspects. For example, the wastewater discharges from plating operations can affect the water quality (pH, total suspended solids, and heavy metals) of a neighbouring waterway.

Alternatively, the existing environmental conditions can also affect an organization’s operations, and in some cases this effect can be detrimental. For example, during heavy rainfall, eroded marshlands can cause flooding to businesses located on the seashore, potentially shutting down operations and causing damage to the facility infrastructure.

Assessments of the environmental condition are frequently the function of government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and scientific and research institutions rather than the function of an individual business. But this information can be used by businesses to

- identify and manage its significant environmental aspects;
- determine if local or regional environmental conditions pose a potential issue.

Since minimizing adverse impacts on the state of the environment is at the heart of ISO 14001, understanding its current condition and how the organization can impact it, either positively or negatively, is the most important factor in understanding the organization’s context.

What should be considered?

The first step in understanding the organization’s context is identifying issues that can affect achievement of its EMS intended outcomes. These issues will vary from one organization to the next, but it can start by considering the questions in [Table 2](#) to determine which are most relevant.

Table 2 — Organizational context considerations

Table 2A — Internal considerations	Table 2B — External considerations
How do the organizational activities, products and services affect the local or regional environment (i.e. its environmental aspects)? Have they caused contamination in the past?	Are local or regional environmental conditions affecting the organization's operations, either in the short-term or long-term? Will availability of natural resources, or lack thereof, affect it?
How is the organization doing managing its environmental aspects (i.e. environmental performance)?	What is the organization's competitive position with regard to environmental performance? Are competitors' products more environmentally friendly or are their operations performed with less adverse environmental impact?
Are there any planned changes to its current activities, products and services, and will this affect, either positively or negatively, its environmental aspects?	Are there new technologies that can be employed to improve environmental performance (i.e. production equipment technology, environmental control technology, information technology, etc.)?
What is the current compliance status? Does it need improving?	Are there new or changing environmental regulations that will need to be addressed? If expanding to other countries, will there be new regulations to implement?
What is the business strategy, and how will it affect achieving the EMS intended outcomes?	Are customers imposing environmental requirements? Have stakeholders expressed concerns about the organization's environmental performance?
Are the necessary and sufficient resource capabilities available for the EMS (i.e. staffing levels, environmental competency, financial, infrastructure)?	Are economic conditions impacting EMS resources, either positively or negatively?
How will the management style, policies and organizational culture influence the EMS?	Are social, cultural or political conditions impacting the EMS?
Are employees engaged in achieving the EMS intended outcomes?	Are supply chain practices performed in an environmentally responsible manner?

Answers to these questions provide information that can help the organization successfully manage its environmental responsibilities. The internal considerations can provide insight on its strengths and weaknesses — what it does well and where it can improve. The external considerations may bring to light a potential opportunity with beneficial effect if pursued, or a threat with detrimental effect if not addressed. The tool “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analyses” (SWOT) can help the organization focus at the strategic level.

NOTE Although split into two clauses in ISO 14001:2015, organizational context includes an understanding of the needs, wants and expectations of interested parties (see [Section 2.2](#)).

2.1.1.3 What is relevant?

When performing the situational analysis of organizational context, there may be many factors that create issues — problems or circumstances — that pertain to the organization’s current approach to environmental management. The reality may be, however, they cannot be tackled all at once.

ISO 14001 uses the phrase, “relevant to its purpose and that affects its ability to achieve the intended outcomes of its EMS” to help an organization determine the relevant issues. The organization focuses on issues that are relevant to its mission and can affect its ability to enhance its environmental performance, fulfil its compliance obligations, and achieve its environmental objectives.

The organization retains the authority and accountability to decide the number of issues it addresses within its EMS: it does not have to address everything at once. When the organization begins planning its EMS (in [Section 6.1](#)), it will establish a process for applying a risk-based approach to these issues in order to identify those that pose the most adverse effect and those that can be leveraged for the most benefit. Through that process, the organization can select and focus on the most pressing issues. Then, through the processes of management review and continual improvement, additional issues can be addressed over time.

ISO 14001 does not require a detailed analysis or documentation of these issues but it may be useful to keep a record of them for future follow-up. At this point, a conceptual understanding of the relevant issues is all that is needed. A more in-depth analysis of the adverse or beneficial effect, which ones need to be addressed and the actions that will be planned to address them in the EMS is determined in [Section 6.1](#).

2.1.2 Helpful hints

Context changes over time; things that are not important initially, may eventually become so. Using a team approach, led by top management, can be helpful in identifying the relevant issues for the business.

Be alert to implicit assumptions that are being made to verify they are valid and remain so in the future.

Smaller organizations, in particular, need to be realistic about the resources they have available and their ability to address the multitude of issues that may be identified. It is best to start with a small number of the most important issues to ensure that the gains realized can be sustained. Over time, additional issues can be tackled.

When looking at the external factors, the focus should be on the associated local and regional implications, although, in some cases, the national or international implications may also be relevant.

Recent societal trends indicate that businesses are expected to exercise better control over the environmental impacts associated with their supply chain.

With the increase in social networking, managing reputational risks will become more important.

2.1.3 Check conformity

Requirement	Y	N	Follow-up actions
Identify relevant internal issues that are important, problematic or changing.			
Identify relevant external issues that are important, problematic or changing.			
Determine if environmental conditions can affect, either positively or negatively, the organization.			
Determine if environmental conditions can be affected, either positively or negatively, by the organization's activities, products or services.			
Determine if these factors pose any other issue(s) that can affect, either positively or negatively, achievement of the EMS intended outcomes.			

2.2 Needs and expectations of interested parties (ISO 14001, Clause 4.2)

It goes without saying that an organization's success is based on doing what has to be done, first and foremost, and also doing what can be done to satisfy additional stakeholder expectations. The key is having a clear idea of which stakeholder groups are relevant, and then deciding which needs and expectations have to be addressed and which ones make sense to address. Understanding the views of stakeholders or interested parties (whichever term used) is one component of the organization's context and provides input when determining issues that are important to address in the EMS.

2.2.1 Getting started

Depending on the organization, there will be an array of interested parties that are important to its success. ISO 14001 defines interested parties as persons or organizations that can affect, be affected by or perceive itself to be affected by a decision or activity by your organization. Finding out what they need and

expect can seem like a daunting task. Figuring out the right ones to address within the EMS, besides mandatory requirements the organization has to comply with (particularly legal requirements), requires a balance between competing, and often conflicting, requests and the resource capability to satisfy them. As with issues that organizations face when understanding its context, each organization retains the authority and accountability to decide which interested party requirements it addresses within its EMS: it may not be able to address everything at once. The ones that cannot be addressed initially can be reconsidered later when the organization performs its management reviews and sets new priorities for improvement.

ISO 14001 does not require a detailed analysis or documentation of these interested party requirements. At this point, a conceptual understanding of what the needs and expectations are is all that is needed so that a decision by management can be made on which interested party requirements it will address in its EMS. A more in depth analysis of these requirements is determined in [Section 6.1](#).



Interested party requirement vs organizational requirement

Some clarification of ISO terms is necessary to avoid confusing an interested party requirement from an organization's requirement. ISO describes a "requirement" as a need or expectation that is stated, generally implied (i.e. custom or common practice) or obligatory (i.e. law or regulation). Interested parties are persons or organizations that can either affect or be affected by a decision your organization makes or by an activity it performs. Sometimes the effect of these decisions or activities have are debatable; the effect may be perceived but may not be supported by fact. In either case, the important distinction is that these represent the interested party needs and expectations, not necessarily the organization's requirements. Each organization determines who the relevant interested parties are and which of their needs and expectations are relevant to the organization. Once relevance is determined, then the organization can decide which ones it has to comply with and which ones it chooses to voluntarily comply with. ISO 14001 refers to this subset of requirements as the organization's compliance obligations.

2.2.1.1 Taking stock of your current state

There are several channels available to learn about interested party requirements related to environmental management. Legal requirements are conveyed

through governmental authorities. Official information about these requirements are found in laws and regulations and can often be found online via the Internet. In some cases, specific requirements are communicated to organizations through permits to operate.

Other requirements might be communicated formally (i.e. contracts, charters, industry-related protocols and written communiques) or informally (i.e. face-to-face meetings and phone calls).

What methods are used to gather and compile information on the needs and expectations of interested parties? Are they proactive or reactive? If they are only reactive, the organization may be incorrectly assuming “no news is good news”.

2.2.1.2 Internal interested parties

The most important internal stakeholders are employees. They are relied upon to implement the day-to-day actions that determine the success of the organization’s EMS, so seeking their input and involvement will convey commitment and nurture a strong environmental ethic. Millennials want to make a difference, and working for an organization that makes a positive impact on the environment is often one of their expectations when evaluating employers. Where the labour force is unionized, it is important to engage the worker representative(s) to gain their support. Seek out their views on environmental concerns regarding work activities, products and services during meetings or via surveys. Follow-up on inquiries, requests, complaints or suggestions made by employees to learn more about their expectations.

In cases where there is a parent organization, its needs and expectations with respect to the environment are often contained in environmental policies or procedures.

The organization may have other important stakeholders — a board of directors, advisory board, investors or donors. They expect the organization’s long-term viability, its reputation, and their investment to be protected. Environmental incidents, regulatory noncompliance or irresponsible actions of suppliers are potential issues which could concern them because these issues can jeopardize the business. A conversation with these stakeholder groups is usually sufficient to determine their expectations.

Table 3 — Examples of interested party

Internal	External
Employees	Customers
Managers	Neighbouring community members
Investors	Suppliers
Board of directors	Regulators
	Trade associations

2.2.1.3 External interested parties

Start by looking at what is formally stated in customer or supplier contracts, laws and permits, or terms in voluntary agreements.

Customers typically specify compliance with applicable laws in the contract terms and conditions. They may send surveys asking about material use or requests to participate in voluntary reporting schemes. When sending out “requests for bid”, they may ask for cost saving measures which can be addressed through, amongst others, waste reduction initiatives.

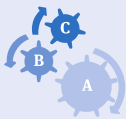
Providers of waste management or public water treatment facilities may set requirements to which the organization must comply. Tenancy agreements may stipulate requirements set by the building owners.

Local, state, national or provincial regulators govern what can be emitted, stored or disposed. Specific limits may have been set on the use of particular hazardous materials, for example, in a facility permit to operate.

There may be environmental criteria found in voluntary agreements that the organization has entered into, such as trade association membership, loan agreements or reporting schemes.

Next, review inquiries, requests, complaints or suggestions made by community members to understand their views and environmental concerns regarding work activities, products and services.

It is not required to seek out input from interested parties who have not contacted the organization directly to express their concerns. However, as resources allow, an organization may choose to incorporate proactive measures to seek input from stakeholder groups using their communication process.



Key linkages

- Organizational context
- Scope of the EMS
- Risks and opportunities
- Compliance obligations
- Communication
- Management review

2.2.2 Helpful hints

Review formal requirements first, including those in contracts, agreements, laws and operating permits. Next, review verbal inquiries or requests. Then, seek input and feedback through proactive methods.

The task of understanding needs and expectations can be done separately or in combination with the more detailed analyses of the organization's compliance obligations, required by Clause 6.1.3 of ISO 14001 (see [Section 4.2](#)).

Smaller organizations in particular need to be realistic about the resources they have available and their ability to address needs and expectations expressed by interested parties. It is best to start with legal requirements and customer requirements to ensure the organization can sustain compliance with them. Over time, additional voluntary requirements can be added.

Interested parties can change over time so it is important to re-evaluate them during the management review process.

2.2.3 Check conformity

Requirement	Y	N	Follow-up actions
Identify relevant internal interested parties.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Determine the environmental requirements they expect of the organization, its operations or its products.			
Identify relevant external interested parties.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Determine the environmental requirements they expect of the organization, its operations or its products.			
Decide which environmental requirements the organization has to comply with.			
Decide which voluntary environmental requirements, if any, the organization chooses to comply with.			

2.3 Scope of the EMS (ISO 14001, Clause 4.3)

2.3.1 Getting started

It is important to clearly articulate the physical and organizational boundaries of the EMS. This defines where the EMS is applicable and will be implemented. The scope of an EMS can include the whole organization, or specific and identified functions or sections of the organization. If the organization makes a statement that it conforms to ISO 14001, then it must make the scope statement available so that interested parties clearly understand what parts of the organization conform.

2.3.1.1 Taking stock of your current state

Look at the current environmental programmes. If there are particular organizational units, work areas, or functions that it applies to, then it makes sense to include those work areas at a minimum. If there are known gaps in the

environmental programme, areas where it is known more work needs to be done to meet requirements, then it makes sense to include those work areas also.

Sphere of control is an important consideration when defining the scope of an EMS. The top manager(s) must have the authority to make the policy commitments and implement an EMS within the functional areas or facilities that are defined within the scope.

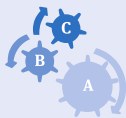
2.3.1.2 Determining the scope of the EMS

The first step in determining the scope is looking at the physical boundaries of the organization and the functional units included, then at the activities products and services conducted within. Top management should decide the extent to which they want to implement their EMS. The important inputs for making the decision include the issues that were identified during the analysis of the organizational context ([Section 2.1](#)), and the compliance obligations that were identified ([Section 2.2](#)).

Once the scope is defined, operations that have or can have significant environmental aspects or applicable compliance obligations cannot be excluded. A common pitfall is not including the products and services that the organization produces. This also includes the goods and services that the organization uses in its operations that it procures from its suppliers. The scope needs to accurately reflect the facilities and functions included to avoid misleading interested parties and potentially undermining the credibility of the organization's EMS.

NOTE The organization's EMS scope is required to be documented and kept up-to-date.

There are several methods for documenting the scope of an EMS, including written descriptions, or diagrams. Whatever approach is used, the key components are: i) identification of the activities involved, ii) the products and services that result, and iii) the location where it occurs.



Key linkages

- Organizational context
- Interested parties
- EMS
- Environmental aspects

2.3.2 Helpful hints

Some organizations start small, and implement an EMS in a phased approach so they can test their EMS processes before implementing them across the whole organization.

Once tested, implementation of the EMS can be expanded across the organization to ensure consistent implementation of environmental practices and to include all functions involved in the product life cycle.

If the EMS scope is limited to a subset of the organization, “top management” refers to those managers who are responsible for that part.

The scope should be re-evaluated when the business expands, adds new facilities or divests portions of its operations.



Communicating

The scope of the organization’s EMS needs to be available to interested parties. Options include providing a written description when inquiries are received, including it on the company website, or posting it in the lobby where visitors can see it. If the company undergoes third party certification, the scope description is included on the certificate, so posting the certificate in the lobby can fulfil the requirement to make the scope available to interested parties.

2.3.3 Check conformity

Requirement	Y	N	Follow-up actions
Determine the boundaries and applicability of the EMS (i.e. scope of the EMS).			
Document the scope.			
Make the scope available to interested parties.			

2.4 Environmental management system (ISO 14001, Clause 4.4)

2.4.1 Getting started

This clause of ISO 14001 specifies a general, overarching requirement for an organization to systematically manage its environmental responsibilities in a manner that enhances its environmental performance, fulfils its compliance obligations and achieves the environmental objectives it sets for itself.

An environmental management system encompasses the organizational elements and set of processes an organization uses to establish and deploy its environmental policy and environmental objectives. ISO 14001 stipulates the set of required elements needed for an environmental management system in each of its clauses.

An organization satisfies this general requirement by conforming to the provisions specified in all clauses of ISO 14001. Not only must an organization establish an EMS, they need to implement, maintain and continually improve it, including any processes necessary to ensure the intended outcomes can be achieved.

2.4.1.1 Taking stock of your current state

All organizations have at least some of the EMS elements in place. By performing an initial review of current management practices, gaps can be identified. Collect information on existing processes to see what is already in place, what processes can be enhanced to meet ISO requirements, and lastly, what

additional information and processes do not yet exist and will have to be established.

Don't limit the review to the environmental department. Other functions, such as human resources, procurement, quality, safety and others, may be implementing processes and generating information similar to that required by ISO 14001. By incorporating the environmental components into existing processes, the organization can integrate the EMS requirements into its business processes.

2.4.1.2 Integration with business processes

One pitfall organizations sometimes make is designing their EMS as a stand-alone system, independent of its routine, standard management practices. Initially, this may meet ISO requirements, but over time actual practice will deviate because normal management practices prevail. For this reason, it is important to integrate the EMS requirements into the standard management practices and business processes.

For example, if an organization conducts an annual strategic planning process to review its market position, customer needs and business performance, then it is more effective to incorporate the assessment of organizational context, interested party needs and expectations, and environmental performance into that process. By doing so, environmental issues can be evaluated in light of the organization's strategy, and environmental initiatives can be aligned with other business priorities. Further, a process that is already well established within the organization is leveraged.



Key linkages

- Organizational context
- Compliance obligations
- Continual improvement

Plus, see all other sections of this guide which describe the individual requirements of an EMS.

2.4.2 Helpful hints

Each organization can choose the way it will satisfy ISO 14001 requirements so that it best suits the organization’s management style and practices. Likewise, it has the autonomy to decide the extent to which it will integrate its EMS into its business processes.

NOTE The documented information that is required for the EMS is specified in the respective sections of this guide.

When starting out, focus on areas where benefit will be reaped. Eliminating or reducing environmental aspects will protect the environment, prevent pollution and improve the organization’s environmental performance. It will have the added benefit of potentially reducing the number of regulations that apply to its operations.

When establishing EMS processes consider how operational efficiency can be improved, administrative burden reduced and cost savings realized.

If the EMS is implemented within a specific operating unit, policies and procedures developed by other parts of the organization can be used to meet requirements as long as they are applicable to that specific unit.

2.4.3 Check conformity

Requirement	Y	N	Follow-up actions
Establish an EMS in conformance with ISO 14001			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Consider the issues and compliance obligations identified (Sections 2.1 and 2.2, respectively)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Apply to the activities products and services that are within the scope of the EMS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Include the processes needed and their interactions.			
Implement the EMS.			
Maintain the EMS.			
Continually improve the EMS.			

3 Setting the direction of the EMS

Top management has a prominent and important role in setting the expectations for the EMS and inspiring the workforce to fulfil those expectations. ISO 14001, identifies three clauses for top management to assist in this effort:

- Leadership
- Setting environmental policy
- Assigning roles, responsibilities and authorities.

3.1 Leadership and commitment (ISO 14001, Clause 5.1)

The experience of many organizations has shown that visible support, involvement and commitment by top management are critical success factors when implementing an EMS. It has also been shown that an EMS aligned with the business strategy can help an organization achieve its business goals. Top managers can appreciate their role as “Leaders” in the organization and their ability to inspire others. They have a responsibility to build an organizational culture that will guide worker behaviour both on and off the job. To realize these synergies, top management needs to understand their ownership role in the EMS.

3.1.1 Getting started

3.1.1.1 Taking stock of your current state

What methods do top managers use to communicate new initiatives? How do they actively garner support? Explore how these methods can be used and enhanced to foster a proactive environmental culture within the organization.

3.1.1.2 Top management as leaders

Top management is the person or group of people who direct and control an organization at the highest level. They have the power to delegate authority and allocate resources. For some organizations this may include the owner or partners, the facility manager and a few key people who report directly to them. For others, it may expand to include board of directors, investors, or, in some cases, the top management of contractors. If the scope of the EMS is limited to only a part of the organization, then top management refers to those who direct and control that part.

These people have a direct role in the EMS. There are particular actions they must do, or direct to be done, in order to lead others in EMS implementation and demonstrate their personal commitment (see Clauses 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 9.3). Top management can delegate some of the tasks and activities involved, which are identified in ISO 14001 with the word “ensure”, but in the end, top management is accountable for the results.

Top management

- Takes accountability for EMS effectiveness
- Communicates importance of EMS and conformance to its requirements
- Directs/supports others to contribute to EMS effectiveness
- Promotes continual improvement
- Supports others in demonstrating their leadership

Top management ensures

- Compatibility of environmental policy and objectives with the organization's context and its strategic direction
- EMS integration into the business processes
- Resource availability
- Achievement of intended outcomes



Communicating

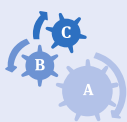
- Leaders communicate the importance of effective environmental management.
- Leaders communicate the importance of conforming to the EMS requirements.

3.1.1.3 Demonstrating leadership

There are a multitude of ways top management can demonstrate that it has fulfilled these requirements.

- Accountability can be demonstrated by assigning and assessing environmental goals for top managers and others during the performance appraisal process.
- Records of talking points during staff meetings can provide proof of discussions on the value and benefits of the EMS and adherence to its requirements.
- Corrective action assignments are ways managers direct others to take action to make the EMS more effective.
- Management review meeting reports show top managements' role in monitoring progress on environmental objectives and evaluating performance.
- Understanding how relevant internal and external issues affect the organization's business goals and environmental responsibilities, and taking that into account when setting the environmental policy commitments and environmental objectives.

- Making sure functional units are aligned on the EMS priorities and are performing their EMS responsibilities.
- Maintaining focus on improving environmental performance, satisfying compliance obligations and achieving environmental objectives when conflicts with other business priorities occur.
- Providing the necessary resources to plan and fulfil the EMS requirements, including personnel time, training, financial support, and necessary equipment and infrastructure.
- Setting and communicating priorities for improvement based on analysis of environmental data, audit recommendations and management reviews.
- During EMS audits, top management describe their involvement in the above activities to auditors.
- Leading by example through personal action.
- Employees provide the ultimate proof when they attest to managements' involvement and support.



Key linkages

- Roles, responsibilities, authorities
- Resources
- Communication
- Management review
- Improvement

3.1.2 Helpful hints ⁵⁾

Establish a vision that captures the level of performance expected, then use passion and persuasion to promote the EMS and to enlist others in making the vision real for the organization.

5) Excerpt from “The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® Model”, The Leadership Challenge, a Wiley brand; <http://www.leadershipchallenge.com/About-section-Our-Approach.aspx>.

Challenge the *status quo*. Encourage innovative ways to improve the organization’s performance. With the team members, identify and promote proactive environmental management initiatives that can yield business benefits.

Set interim goals so that people can achieve small wins as they work toward larger environmental objectives. Unravel bureaucracy when it impedes action. Provide guidance and direction when conflicts occur or the next steps are unclear. Treat mistakes and failures as learning opportunities.

Foster collaboration and team spirit to build an environmental ethic among employees in the organization.

Share information on key environmental issues and performance indicators at regular management meetings.

Recognize individual contributions, reward their efforts and celebrate successes along the way.

3.1.3 Check conformity

Requirement	Y	N	Follow-up actions
Organizational leaders:			
• are accountable for EMS effectiveness			
• communicate the importance of responsible environmental management and adhering to EMS requirements			
• direct and support others to participate in EMS activities and do their part in achieving the planned results			
• promote continual improvement of the EMS and environmental performance			
• assist and support others to demonstrate environmental leadership in their work activities.			
Top managers ensure environmental policy commitments and objectives:			
• reflect the most important internal and external issues that pertain to the EMS			

Requirement	Y	N	Follow-up actions
• are aligned with and support the business strategy.			
Top managers facilitate the integration of EMS requirements into the core business processes.			
Top managers ensure its EMS improves environmental performance, meets compliance obligations and achieves environmental objectives.			
Top managers ensure sufficient resources for the EMS are available.			

3.2 Environmental policy (ISO 14001, Clause 5.2)

An environmental policy is the mechanism for top management to formally state their commitments to the environment. It sets the direction for the organization and describes the expected results from systematically managing its environmental aspects.

At a minimum, three commitments are required:

- protection of the environment,
- fulfilment of compliance obligations, and
- continual improvement of the EMS to enhance environmental performance.

The environmental policy commitments are the foundation for the EMS. The work practices put in place enable the organization to operate in a manner consistent with these commitments. Environmental objectives are set to drive improvement where needed to better align with these commitments. The EMS is designed to achieve the environmental policy commitments over time.

It is important to share the organization's commitments with its employees, contractors and others who work on behalf of the organization so they understand top managements' expectations and can perform their work in a manner that contributes to achieving those results. Making the environmental policy publicly available, or available upon request, provides assurance to community members and customers that the organization is doing its part to protect the environment.



Communicating the environmental policy

- Posters in the workplace
- Training classes
- Employee meetings
- Print on badges
- Business stationary
- E-mail signature statement
- Websites
- Annual reports

3.2.1 Getting started

3.2.1.1 Taking stock of your current state

What policies or environmental commitments does the organization already have? They may not be captured in an “environmental policy” *per se*, but there may be similar commitments in its ethics and compliance, quality or other organizational policies.

Take into consideration the organization’s context, interested party expectations, and the scope of the EMS to be sure the commitments are relevant to the environmental impacts of its activities, products and services, and reflect the environmental challenges the organization faces.

3.2.1.2 Policy commitments

Three policy commitments are required by ISO 14001. Organizations may tailor their commitments so they are meaningful, achievable and stretch its capabilities. Top management owns these commitments and will need to provide the support necessary to demonstrate that it is living by its policy commitments.

By addressing the significant environmental aspects of the organization’s activities, products and services, the environmental policy commitments