



White Paper

A roadmap for change - ISO 14001:2026 Environmental Management Systems

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Environmental Management Systems

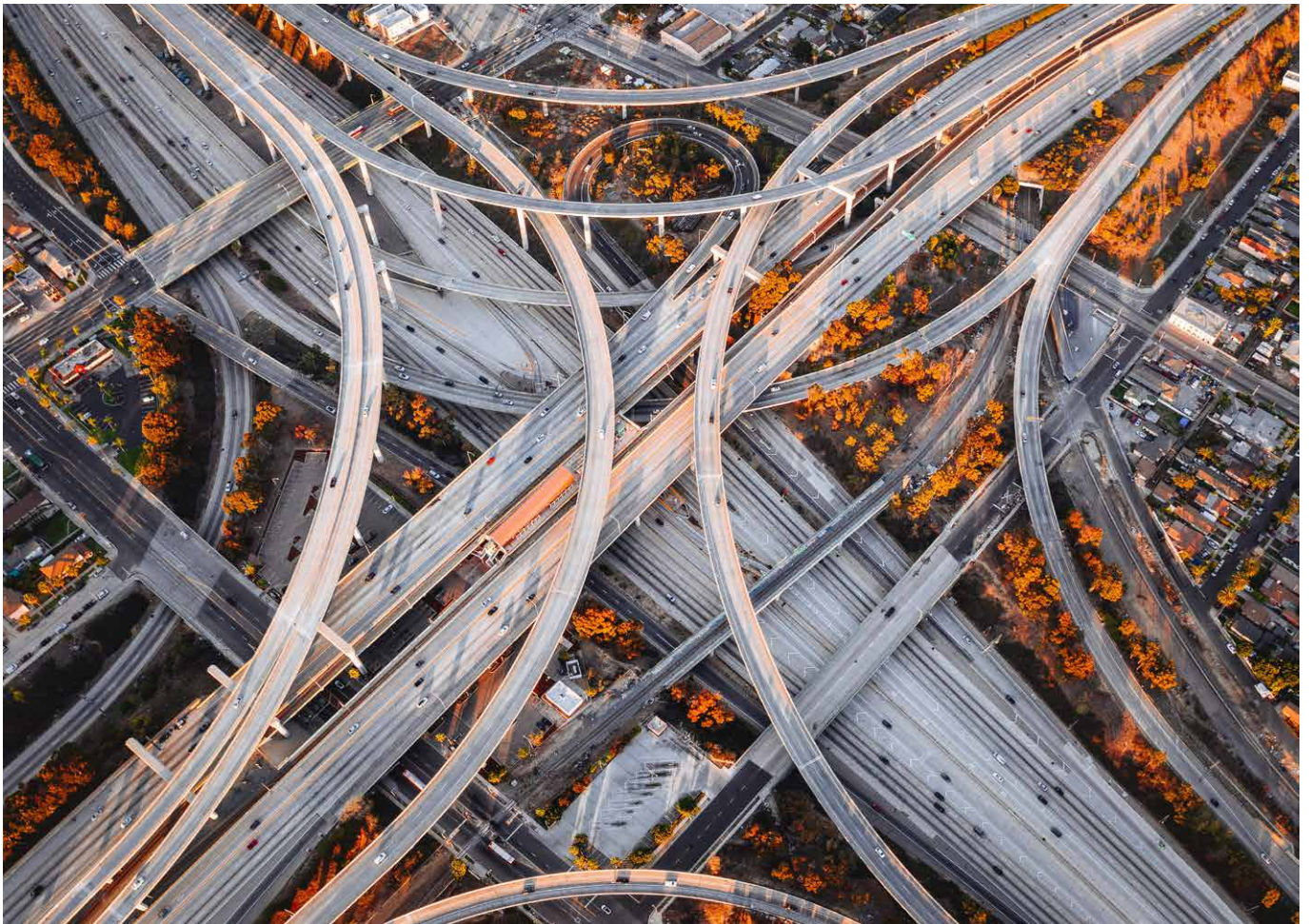
The conflict between environmental contamination, climate change, and economic growth has become increasingly prominent, attracting widespread attention from governments around the world. As a result, achieving economic development while simultaneously reducing environmental pollution has gradually become a global consensus.

This has led to growing efforts to explore and promote green and sustainable models of economic development.

In this context, the Environmental Management System (EMS) certification standard, ISO 14001, has emerged as the most widely adopted environmental management framework worldwide.

This white paper outlines:

- [Where did ISO 14001 begin?](#)
- [What is the transition period to ISO 14001:2026?](#)
- [What are the aims for the revision to ISO 14001:2026?](#)
- [What are the steps to complying to ISO 14001:2026?](#)



1. Where did ISO 14001 begin?

It is estimated that more than 670 000 certified organisations worldwide rely on the Environmental Management System (EMS) standard ISO 14001 to demonstrate environmental responsibility.

First developed in 1996 to provide a global framework for environmental management systems, the standard first focused on pollution control and management of negative environmental impacts, setting minimum requirements for organisations to define environmental policies and objectives.

Now, it is increasingly used as a framework for managing environmental impacts, meeting regulatory requirements and turning sustainability goals into measurable impact.

2. What is the transition period to ISO 14001:2026?

ISO 14001 was updated in April 2026; meaning organisations are five months closer to the April 2029 transition deadline included to comply. Organisations certified to the 2015 edition have three-years in total to transition to and meet the requirements of the 2026 version.

After that, ISO 14001:2015 certificates will no longer be valid and from October 2027, certification bodies will no longer be able to issue new certificates against the 2015 edition. New applicants will need to certify against 2026 from that point.

Although the deadline may seem distant, several clauses have been updated and one new clause 6.3 - Management of Environmental Change, has been added, meaning it is worth acting now.

3. What are the aims for the revision to ISO 14001:2026?

The changes reflect a greater importance on leadership accountability, climate resilience, biodiversity, emergency preparedness, supply chain controls, management review and sustainable resource use, while clarifying and strengthening existing requirements.

The ISO14001 revision also aims to improve clarity, traceability and accountability, while aligning with ISO 9001:2026 (quality) and the anticipated ISO 45001:2027 update (health and safety). For organisations with an integrated management system, this provides an opportunity to realign and simplify processes as the changes place greater emphasis on worker participation and organisational resilience.



4. What are the steps for complying to ISO 14001:2026?

Outlined are our eight steps to compliance:

Step 1 - Brief the leadership and management team

Leadership and management teams must make sure that relevant roles have the resources and support needed to address environmental considerations within the organisation's business context.

Outcome: Your leadership team understands what is changing and the support required to address the business context, supply chain and management of change.

Step 2 - Review your organisational context and interested parties

Requirements relating to environmental conditions, including climate change are clear and firmly established.

Outcome: Review your assessment of organisational context and interested parties by:

- Formalising and reinforcing updates introduced previously around environmental conditions (including climate change) including a review of your existing context and interested parties;
- Explicitly considering environmental conditions i.e. flooding, drought – those relevant to the organisation; and
- Reviewing stakeholder needs/expectations where necessary these should be treated as compliance obligations.

Step 3 - Perform a gap analysis:

Understand where you currently sit against the new requirements to build a road map towards fully meeting the enhanced and the new requirements.

Outcome: Apply the gap analysis findings with specific focus on:

- Clarifying the scope wording within the EMS (not just using the scope of your certificate);
- Lifecycle consideration throughout the value chain;
- Consideration of supply chain controls and areas of influence;
- Filing internal audit objectives and supporting evidence testing the updated requirements;
- Reviewing and updating management review agendas and inputs; and
- Make sure that key system documents align with the revised language and the documentation terminology (for example, "maintained" rather than "available").



Step 4 - Update scope with control, influence and lifecycle

Your scope must consider the organisation's authority and ability to exercise control and influence over lifecycle elements of activities, products and services.

Outcome: Reviewing your organisation's scope will then lead to you:

- Having reviewed where lifecycle thinking applies (procurement, packaging, transport, product use/disposal) and avoided causes and adverse impacts being shifted elsewhere.
- Having documented your decision on how you interpret "control" and "influence" in your context and made changes proportionate to your business

Step 5 - New clause 6.3 - Management of Environmental Change.

Clause 6.3 is a new requirement introduced in ISO 14001:2026 that establishes a formal management of change process within the Environmental Management System (EMS). Unlike ISO 14001:2015, which contained no dedicated change management requirement. This new clause requires organisations to systematically identify, assess, plan, control, and manage any changes that may affect the EMS.

Outcome: Formal processes to ensure that environmental performance, compliance obligations, and the intended outcomes of the EMS are maintained throughout periods of organisational, operational, or external change.

- Introduce an "environmental change" method integrated into aspects, risks / opportunities, controls and objectives which addresses:
- Compliance obligations
- Operations / processes
- Materials / suppliers
- Supply chain disruption / business continuity scenarios

Step 6 - Strengthen operational control language and supplier/contractor controls.

Terminology in the EMS is updated to 'Externally provided processes, products and services', and reinforces the need to establish the level of control or influence.

Outcome: Reviewing and strengthening your supplier and contractor controls by:

- Reviewing your procurement and contractor controls considering supplier expectations.
- Reviewing contractor induction/controls/monitoring (where environmental risk exists) and evidenced that your controls reflect the risk and context identified.



Step 7 - Internal audits

Objectives, programme, implementation and results must be clearly defined.

Outcome: You have reviewed training and templates for internal audits making sure that you have defined objectives, including the audit programme, implementation and audit results (including outcome and key findings) and specific documentation is available and make sure you can evidence this.

Step 8 - Management review

Management review inputs are more definitive and should be treated as a required agenda.

Outcome: You have reviewed your management review template, so it clearly captures required, inputs and outputs/results and demonstrated leadership oversight of transition. As the leadership team have been briefed as part of step 1 this allows this to be demonstrated and any support required to address the business context, supply chain and management of change updated as a result.



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