

ISO and climate change

Why are many of the familiar ISO management system standards being amended, and what does this mean for standards users?

LRQA



Introduction

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has announced the inclusion of climate change requirements to a number of its management system standards. The development, aligned with the ISO London Declaration on Climate Change, signifies the growing commitment from the assurance industry to global sustainability and is set to bring positive change for both clients and the planet.



Frequently asked questions

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Why is ISO amending many of its management system standards?

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In 2021, ISO signed into force its “London Declaration” on climate change, in which ISO committed to work with its members, the national standards bodies, and with other stakeholders and partners, to ensure that international standards and publications accelerate the achievement of the Paris Agreement, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Call for Action on Adaptation and Resilience. This amounted to making action on climate change a strategic priority for the whole ISO organisation.

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What are the changes?

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Two changes are being introduced, both in Clause 4 of the standards (Context of the organisation). The clause is shown below with the new text highlighted by 

4.1 Understanding the organisation and its context

The organisation shall determine external and internal issues that are relevant to its purpose and that affect its ability to achieve the intended result(s) of its XXX management system.

 The organisation shall determine whether climate change is a relevant issue.

4.2 Understanding the needs and expectations of interested parties

The organisation shall determine:

- The interested parties that are relevant to the XXX management system;
- The relevant requirements of these interested parties;
- Which of these requirements will be addressed through the XXX management system.

 NOTE: Relevant interested parties can have requirements related to climate change.



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Which standards are affected?

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The standards affected by the amendment are standards that use the harmonised approach of Annex SL and include standards such as ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and ISO 45001. Over 30 MSS are being amended as part of this process.

An exception is being made for any MSS that are in the final stages prior to the publication of a full revision. In such cases, the changes will simply be included as part of the revision. ISO 9001, ISO 14001, and ISO 45001 will all be amended in early 2023, as work on the revision of these standards is still in its early stages, with publication not expected until 2025 or beyond.

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Do the changes classify as a revision of the standard and is there a revision period?

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The affected standards are being updated via the process of “amendment”, which differs from the process which follows when a standard is “revised”. An amendment is a list of changes to a standard; in this case, a single-page document describing what additional words have been added, and where they have been added.

Amending a standard leaves the existing version of the standard in force but with these additions and is quite different from a revision, where the whole document is republished with changes incorporated into a new version that supersedes the previous version.

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When will the amendments be published?

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ISO is set to simultaneously release the amendments of all affected standards early in 2024 and will take immediate effect. Unlike when standards are revised, there will be no transition period for organisations to adopt changes, as, in the case of these amendments, the changes are small and do not introduce any new requirements. However, recognising the potential need for organisations to adjust, auditors will treat issues related to climate change as opportunities for improvement during the initial 12 months following the amendments.



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How will the amendments affect standard users?

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The amendments mean that organisations will now need to be able to demonstrate that they have considered whether climate change is relevant to each discipline, where the term “relevant” means capable of having an impact on the organisation’s ability to meet its objectives relevant to that discipline, in other words, its quality objectives, its OHS objectives, or its asset management objectives, etc.

This means considering risks related to climate change itself, together with risks from actions related to climate adaptation and climate mitigation. For example:

- Risks related to climate change itself might include extreme weather events disrupting supply chains or operations or causing injury to workers,
- Actions associated with climate adaptation might include increased night-time working in sectors such as agriculture in response to excessive day-time temperatures, with an associated increase in OH&S risks, and
- Actions associated with climate mitigation, such as the installation of on-site renewable energy generation, may introduce new risks – e.g. OH&S risks where maintenance of the equipment is required.

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Is ISO planning any further action related to climate change?

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For MSS, the upcoming amendments are the first step in the implementation of ISO’s London Declaration. But, as indicated earlier, individual technical committees are being encouraged to consider what else may be needed for their areas of responsibility and to take action as necessary.





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