



Four years of ISO 45001

THE BENEFITS OF ISO 45001 SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT



ISO 45001 has been widely accepted and recognised as a management system framework that can be tailored to reflect the specific conditions in every organisation, with a focus on leadership that embraces worker consultation and participation. It is therefore acknowledged as a significant development from OHSAS 18001.

In addition, by adopting Annex SL, ISO 45001 aligns with other ISO management systems like ISO 9001 for quality management and ISO 14001 for environmental management, for a truly harmonised approach.

COVID has significantly impacted work worldwide and ISO 45001, together with the additional guidance provided in ISO PAS 45005, has enabled organisations to adapt their OH&S arrangements to address the situations created by this event, thanks to its flexible framework.

Specifically, the structure of plan, do, check and act with the emphasis on leadership, worker engagement and participation has allowed organisations

to make changes effectively, evaluate the impact and improve as necessary. This has been critical due to the very dynamic situation created by the pandemic. This period has demonstrated that an effective management system, which encourages adaptation and improvement, actually contributes to organisational resilience and sustainability.

The pandemic has also highlighted the psychological health and safety of workers, so the arrival of ISO 45003 in 2021, the guidance standard on managing psychosocial risks in the workplace, has also provided very helpful support to organisations. It includes a better understanding of what ISO 45001 requires, as well as guidance on how organisations

can tackle these frequently neglected issues. In proactively addressing workers' psychological health and wellbeing, the focus is on eliminating hazards and controlling risks before harm occurs, rather than on rehabilitation after the fact. This contributes to better employee morale, less staff turnover and greater overall organisational efficiency.

How ISO 45001 has supported and improved the new workplace dynamic

ISO 45001 defines a workplace as anywhere a worker needs to go or be for work purposes, and recognises that the amount of control any organisation has over that workplace may vary. This definition was actually a part of ISO 45001 when it was first written, since remote work was already prevalent prior to the pandemic.

That being said, the abrupt lockdowns due to COVID resulted in remote working becoming the only viable solution for many. This brought about new challenges in terms of the physical work environment and the psychosocial impacts. It also affected those whose work required them to be away from their families for extended periods; the impact on seafarers, for example, has been extensively reported recently in the media.

ISO 45001 includes the requirement for organisations to address remote working and provides the framework in which to do it, and ISO 45003 adds valuable, associated guidance. The elements of worker consultation and participation, which are emphasised in ISO 45001, are key to success in any organisation where the workplace can no longer be managed by traditional methods.

ISO 45001 adoption accelerating worldwide

Based on the most recent ISO survey in 2021, ISO 45001 now tracks third behind ISO 9001 and ISO 14001, despite being a much newer standard. Significantly, its annual growth rate, based on the same survey, was 490% compared to 4% for ISO 9001 and 12% for 14001.

Much of this rapid growth is due to most organisations previously certified to OHSAS 18001 transitioning to ISO 45001. Higher visibility and the trend toward greater focus on occupational health and safety have resulted in a significant number of organisations adopting ISO 45001, many of whom were not users of OHSAS 18001.

COVID has certainly added to this trend, as has the growing interest from the investor community in an organisation's environment, social and governance (ESG) profiles. There is also a broader recognition of the need for resilience and sustainability and OH&S makes an important contribution to all of these factors.

The impact of ISO 45001 continues to elevate globally with its translation into additional languages and its adoption as a national standard in several countries. Recent examples of this include the adoption of ISO 45001 as the national standard in Jordan, and its publication in Arabic, which is expected to increase its acceptance and implementation in the Middle East. The adoption of ISO 45001 in Australia and New Zealand has led to it becoming a requirement for some government tenders and being referenced in legislation, recognising its alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as its value for the overall betterment of its citizenry.

Enabling progress and improving sustainability

ISO 45001 continues to support and enable organisations worldwide to improve their workplace environments, strengthen worker satisfaction, and increase overall efficiency through better management of occupational health, safety and wellbeing.

With an increasing focus on sustainability and resilience, organisations face many challenges including climate change, demographic changes in the workplace, and changing societal expectations regarding diversity and inclusion. Organisations can effectively embrace the movement forward by adopting a proactive, collaborative, and systematic approach to managing the health, safety and wellbeing of workers, especially in these uncertain times, to facilitate their best performance and results.

Changes to ISO 45001

A large majority of countries that responded to a ballot of national standards bodies conducted in 2021 year, asked that ISO 45001 be left as is for now. While the current standard, as a result, remains confirmed, the process has yielded many suggestions as to where improvements could be made to ISO 45001 when revision does occur.

There has also been direct feedback in the annual ISO 45001 user survey, the results of which will soon be shared via the ISO/TC 283, the committee responsible for the on-going development of the new ISO standard ISO 45001 Occupational health and safety management systems, on their website and social media.

The committee has therefore proposed to establish a task group to examine this feedback, as well as other areas where change may be needed to address challenges like climate change, new technologies, and the changing boundaries of the workplace. This will include reviewing the impact of the latest version of Annex SL, as well as examining how to adjust the language on inclusivity to provide clearer direction and examples.

Research carried out last year by ISO, looking specifically at gender responsiveness, highlighted that the words used to address inclusivity issues tend to be generic, with phrases like "addressing the needs of all workers". More specific, clear and unambiguous language is being included in the guidance standards to help explain how to interpret these nonspecific phrases, so that all workers' needs are addressed going forward.

A particular consideration for any revision will be the accessibility and applicability of ISO 45001 to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), which account for a substantial proportion of the national economy in many countries. While the principles of ISO 45001 apply equally to SMEs, their awareness and use of the standard is less widespread compared to larger organisations, and feedback indicates that some of the language used may be a barrier to its adoption. In the meantime, the ISO 45001 handbook, "Practical Guide for Smaller Organisations", which is tailored to the conditions in smaller organisations, is part of the current effort to provide SMEs with the guidance to adopt the standard and benefit from its implementation.

Future OH&S guidance standards

As part of the ongoing effort to improve and develop occupational health and safety performance worldwide, three guidance standards are currently under development:



2017-2018 ISO 45001:

Following the release of a final draft at the end of November 2017, ISO 45001, international standard for occupational health and safety (OH&S), was finally published on 12th March 2018.



2019 - 2021 ISO 45003:

Draft guidance for ISO 45003, a framework for how organisations can manage psychosocial risks, was drawn up in 2019 and published June 2021 after a two year consultation and revision period.



2020 ISO/PAS 45005:

Soon after the sudden outburst of COVID-19, ISO/PAS 45005 was drafted to offer guidance for safe working during the pandemic.



Due for publication late 2022 ISO 45002:

An implementation guide for the requirements of ISO 45001.



Due for publication 2023 - 2024 ISO 45006:

A guidance document on preventing and managing infectious diseases in the workplace.



Due for publication 2024 ISO 45004:

A guidance document on OH&S performance evaluation.

Get in touch

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