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TOPIC BRIEFING

ISO 14001 (EMS Standard)

Enterprises in the following sectors are most likely to adopt the ISO 14001 standard:

Pulp and paper, Textile and Dyes, Iron and Steel, Chemicals and Petrochemicals, Pharmaceuticals, Power, Cement, Paints and Coatings Automotive, other forms of manufacturing, mining

Key URL: www.iso.org

DISCLAIMERS:

This is a simplified, non-technical briefing for informational purposes. It has not been reviewed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the developer of the ISO 14001 standard.

This topic briefing does not constitute or imply endorsement of the ISO 14001 standard by USAID.

Overview. The ISO 14001 standard specifies requirements for an Environmental Management System (EMS) intended to assure that an organization implements basic good environmental management practices, including compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

An EMS is simply the set of policies and procedures that an organization uses to manage its environmental performance.

ISO 14001 is part of the ISO 14000 series of standards pertaining to environmental management.

Governing/developer organization. ISO, the International Organization for Standardization, is a non-profit organization that is a “federation of the national standards bodies of 149 countries, one per country, from all regions of the world, including developed, developing and transitional economies.”¹

ISO describes this federation as a “global network that identifies what International Standards are required by business, government and society, develops them in partnership with the sectors that will put them into use, adopts them by transparent procedures based on national input, and delivers them to be implemented worldwide.”²

Conformity with ISO 14001 is verified by certification bodies (often for-profit organizations) independent of ISO. Certification bodies are themselves accredited, most often by a national accreditation entity.³ Sometimes this entity is also the national standards body that is a member of ISO.

¹ ISO. “ISO in Brief: International Standards for a sustainable world.” ISBN 92-67-10401-2. ISO 2005-03. Available at www.iso.org.

² *ibid.*

³ ISO 14001 is usually only one of a number of standards that such bodies deal with. For information about international recognition of national accreditations, see www.iaf.org, the website of the international accreditation forum.

Extent of application. ISO 14001 was launched in 1996. As of April 2005, over 88,000 companies worldwide had been certified as conforming to ISO 14001. In addition, there are a significant number of organizations around the world licensed to certify implementation of/conformity to the ISO 14001 standard.

In Asia and Latin America, ISO 14001 has an increasingly stronger foothold. In Africa, there is a sprinkling of companies across the continent.

Some larger multinationals are now requiring their suppliers to comply with ISO 14001 specifically, or to demonstrate implementation of an equivalent EMS. For suppliers in certain sectors, ISO 14001 certification is likely to increasingly become a de facto requirement.

In recent years the number of ISO 14001-certified companies has increased dramatically.

Basic requirements of the standard. An organization that has implemented an ISO 14001-compliant EMS should systematically:

- Identify key environmental challenges and the steps necessary to build the corresponding capacity to address such problems. This includes achieving and maintaining compliance with any applicable environmental laws and regulations.
- Set environmental objectives and targets for continuous improvement
- Put in place monitoring to assess compliance and measure progress towards targets
- Establish training programmes and environmental reporting procedures.

Other components include monitoring legal requirements and establishing emergency preparedness and response measures.

Potential competitive benefits for enterprises in developing economies. In developing countries, ISO 14001 accreditation can compensate for real or perceived weaknesses in national environmental regulation and enforcement.

Adoption of ISO 14001 implies a commitment to “beyond compliance” environmental performance that may improve the enterprise’s ability to serve as a supplier to foreign/multinational customers.

In some instances, adoption of ISO 14001 can reduce the costs of liability insurance. Enterprises conforming to ISO 14001 in

some cases receive preferential treatment from regulatory authorities.