



ACCREDITATION RULE 13

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SUBJECT: Significant Environmental Aspects and Impacts

APPLIES TO: ANAB Accredited and Applicant EMS Certification Bodies

PREFACE

Is an organization required to have identified significant aspects to be registered to ISO 14001 or RC14001? This Accreditation Rule is intended to answer that question.

ISO 14001 requires an organization to establish and maintain (a) procedure(s) to identify the environmental aspects of its activities, products, and services to determine those which have or can have (a) significant impact(s) on the environment (4.3.1), that is, its significant environmental aspects. The standard also requires these significant environmental aspects be considered by the organization when establishing processes to address objectives and targets (4.3.3); training, awareness, and competency (4.4.2); communication (4.4.3); documentation (4.4.4); operational control (4.4.6); and monitoring and measurement (4.5.1). Although there is no explicit requirement, there is an underlying assumption that the organization will identify one or more significant environmental aspects. This assumption is consistent with a Clarification of Intent published by the U.S. TAG to ISO/TC207, reference 04-03.A1, which can be accessed at <http://standardsgroup.asq.org/environmental-management/index.html>.

Based on the preceding, an organization is expected to identify its environmental aspects and impacts, and, through an evaluation process it defines for itself, determine those that are significant. Neither ISO 14001 nor IAF Guidance defines "significance" or identifies any external or absolute external standard that does so. What is significant for one organization may not be significant for another, and what an organization considers a significant aspect may change over time. There is no absolute measure of significance; rather, significance is internal to the relative importance of aspects as defined by the organization. An organization may use different terminology, such as "important aspects" or "higher value aspects." Regardless, the intent is that an organization prioritize its aspects and focus its attention and resources on the higher value or important ones, that is, the "significant environmental aspects," and then establish an EMS to manage those aspects. Prioritization is intended to be internal to the organization for the purpose of managing its continuing improvement, and therefore inherent to continuation of the EMS.

An organization that identified no significant environmental aspects and impacts might then deem itself not obligated to consider these when setting objectives and targets; establishing competency for and training its personnel; considering processes for external communication; identifying and implementing operational controls; or monitoring and measuring the key characteristics of its operations. Without significant environmental aspects and these related system elements, the organization would not have implemented an EMS in conformance with ISO 14001 and IAF Guidance.

ACCREDITATION RULE

An organization must identify the environmental aspects and impacts that have a higher value, significance, or importance, and use these resultant aspects and impacts to appropriately address the requirements of the standard for objectives and targets, personnel training and awareness, communication, operational controls, and monitoring and measurement (as evidenced in procedures or

processes). Unless the organization has done this, it cannot be certified for conformance to ISO 14001 or RC14001 because its system for determination of significance is not effective.