

ISO 14001 ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AUDIT (4.5.4)

In order to be in conformance with this provision of ISO 14001 an organization must be able to answer the overall question: "How does the organization conduct environmental audits of the EMS?". In order to answer that question four specific tasks must be addressed under the Management System Audit section of the standard. First, the organization must develop a program and related procedures that define an audit plan of the environmental management system. In addition the program must define frequency of the audit process. Second, the procedures must specify the methodology of the audit process, including the qualifications of the auditors. Third, the audit reports must be submitted to top management. Fourth, the audit reports must provide recommendations directed at correcting any reported nonconformance that was discovered in the audit process.

The audit process discussed in this section of the standard is directed at internal audits. The standard is silent on the frequency issue. Generally accepted practice with a mature ISO 14001 system is a total audit of the system once a year. In the implementation phase of an environmental management system a more frequent audit process might be appropriate. In addition any part of the environmental management system that has been previously determined to be in nonconformance should be audited with an increased frequency. The methodology of the audit process required by the standard requires two distinct steps:

- A. determine whether the environmental management system conforms to the requirements of ISO 14001, and
- B. that the system has been managed as described in the Environmental Policy statement, the Environmental Objectives and Targets, and the related work descriptions and procedures.

It is critical that an audit report that relates a nonconformance be forwarded to top management promptly. The internal audit staff must be competent with respect to the requirements of ISO 14001.

Questions That Need To Be Answered:

The following questions need to be answered in order to determine whether the Environmental Management System Audit Section meets the intent of ISO 14001:

1. Has the organization established a program and procedure for an EMS audit?
2. Are the program and procedure designed to:
 - a. determine conformance to the EMS?
 - b. determine conformance with ISO 14001?
 - c. provide reports to top management?

The following questions need to be answered in order to determine whether the Environmental Management System Audit Section meets the intent of ISO 14001: (cont.)

3. Does program recognize the need for increased audit frequency for areas of the EMS with previous nonconformance?
4. Does the program require competency of the auditors?