ISO 14001:2015

Don’t miss the deadline!

Successful businesses understand that it is the present that subscribes the future. Engaging with the commercial aspects of environmental issues means more than just managing the organization's impacts; it means taking actions today to control impacts that will directly affect the organization and the market. That's why organizations need continual, robust and wide-ranging environmental management.

Companies have long awaited for the ISO 14001:2015 revision, and if you are still unaware about the changes to the standard, now is the time to see what they really mean to your Environmental Management System.

The new ISO 14001 contains updates and also extends globally recognized requirements for establishing, implementing, maintaining and continually improving an Environmental Management System (EMS) at any organization, regardless of type or size.

There are several benefits that come from adopting and implementing a system compliant with ISO 14001, with this standard promoting:

- Better integration with other business activities
- Enhancement of the process approach and PDCA cycle
- Greater involvement of upper management in the EMS
- Consideration of the whole lifecycle of the product or service when assessing aspects
- Greater emphasis on environmental performance monitoring
- Cost savings through better management of resources and less waste
- Legal compliance, reducing the risk of fines and adverse publicity
- Broader business opportunities as a result of evident compliance

Main changes to ISO 14001:2015

ISO common framework for management systems

Perhaps the biggest difference between the old and the new standard is the structure. This is because the new edition uses the new Annex SL template, which incorporates identical core text, and common terms with core definitions.

According to the ISO, all future management system standards (MSSs) will use this new layout and share the same basic requirements. The new framework is designed to benefit users implementing multiple ISO management system standards and to be applicable to any management system standard. This allows compatibility across ISO management system standards while offering subject-specific flexibility.

Main changes to ISO 14001:2015

Environmental management has gained a higher profile within strategic planning processes at organizations. A new requirement to understand an organization’s context has been incorporated to identify and leverage opportunities for the benefit of both the organization and the environment.

This means that companies need to identify and understand the external issues and the external environmental conditions that could influence an organization's EMS and the results that it intends to achieve. It also means that the organization needs to identify and understand the internal issues and internal environmental conditions that could influence its EMS and the intended results. Likewise, the standard also expects companies to identify the stakeholders relevant to their EMS and to identify their needs and expectations.

Once this is done, companies are supposed to study these needs and expectations and to figure out which are now required for compliance. But why is all this necessary? Because the EMS will need to be able to manage all of these influences. Once organizations understand their context, they are expected to use this knowledge to help to define the EMS and the challenges it must deal with.

Strategic Environmental Management

Main changes to ISO 14001:2015

Risk planning

The entire planning process in environmental management has been restructured and should more comprehensively consider the (positive and negative) environmental impacts of activities, products and services, “from a lifecycle perspective” in the future. An environmental assessment should examine significant environmental aspects and all required commitments (legal, customer-specific, etc.), as well as any risks associated with possible hazards and opportunities.

So, what does this mean and what does the new standard expect organizations to do? They should start by establishing a risk planning process and should then use this process to identify risks and opportunities related to their organization’s unique context, its stakeholders, its compliance obligations, and its environmental aspects. This standard wants companies to define actions to address all of these risks and opportunities, while also ensuring that these actions will really be carried out. Companies are asked to make these actions an integral part of their EMS processes, and then to implement, control, evaluate and review the effectiveness of these actions and processes. Risk planning is now an integral part of the new ISO 14001 standard.

Main changes to ISO 14001:2015

Reflecting the evolution of management systems, the revised standard uses the term “documented information,” instead of “documents” and “records.” To align with ISO 9001, the organization will retain the flexibility to determine when ‘procedures’ are needed to ensure effective process control.

According to the ISO definition, the term documented information refers to information that must be controlled and maintained. So, whenever ISO 14001:2015 uses the term documented information, there is an implicit expectation that companies will control and maintain this information and the media that supports it.

Requirements for documented information are spread throughout the standard. However, in short, organizations must control and maintain information regarding compliance obligations, environmental objectives, evidence of competence, risk associated with threats and opportunities, evidence of monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation results, evidence of the implementation of audit programs, and more.

Documented information

Main changes to ISO 14001:2015

Exclusions

The new standard no longer refers to environmental targets. According to section A.6.2, "The concept of “target” used in prior editions of this International Standard is included within the definition of “environmental objective.”

The term management representative has been officially dropped. The management duties and responsibilities that were previously assigned to someone called a “management representative” may now be assigned either to one person or to several.

The new ISO 14001 standard no longer uses the term preventive action. Companies are now expected to use risk planning concepts and to think of the entire EMS as a system of preventive action.

Other clarifications and modifications

Leadership

To ensure the success of the system, a new clause has been added that assigns specific responsibilities to those in leadership roles to promote environmental management within the organization.

Protecting the environment

The expectation for organizations has been expanded to a commitment to proactive initiatives to protect the environment from harm and degradation. The revised standard does not define ‘protect the environment’ but it is noted that this may include prevention of pollution, sustainable resource use, climate change mitigation and adaptation, protection of biodiversity and ecosystems, etc.

Environmental performance

There is a shift in emphasis with regard to continual improvement, from improving the management system to improving environmental performance.

Lifecycle perspective

Lifecycle considerations were largely ignored by the old standard. Now they're central. Organizations will need to extend their control and influence to the environmental impacts associated with product design and development to address each stage of the lifecycle, i.e. acquisition of raw materials, design, production, transportation/delivery, use, end-of-life treatment and final disposal.

Communication

The development of a communication strategy with equal emphasis on external and internal communications has been added. This includes a requirement for communicating consistent and reliable information, and establishing alternatives for persons working under the organization's control to make suggestions regarding improvement of the environmental management system.

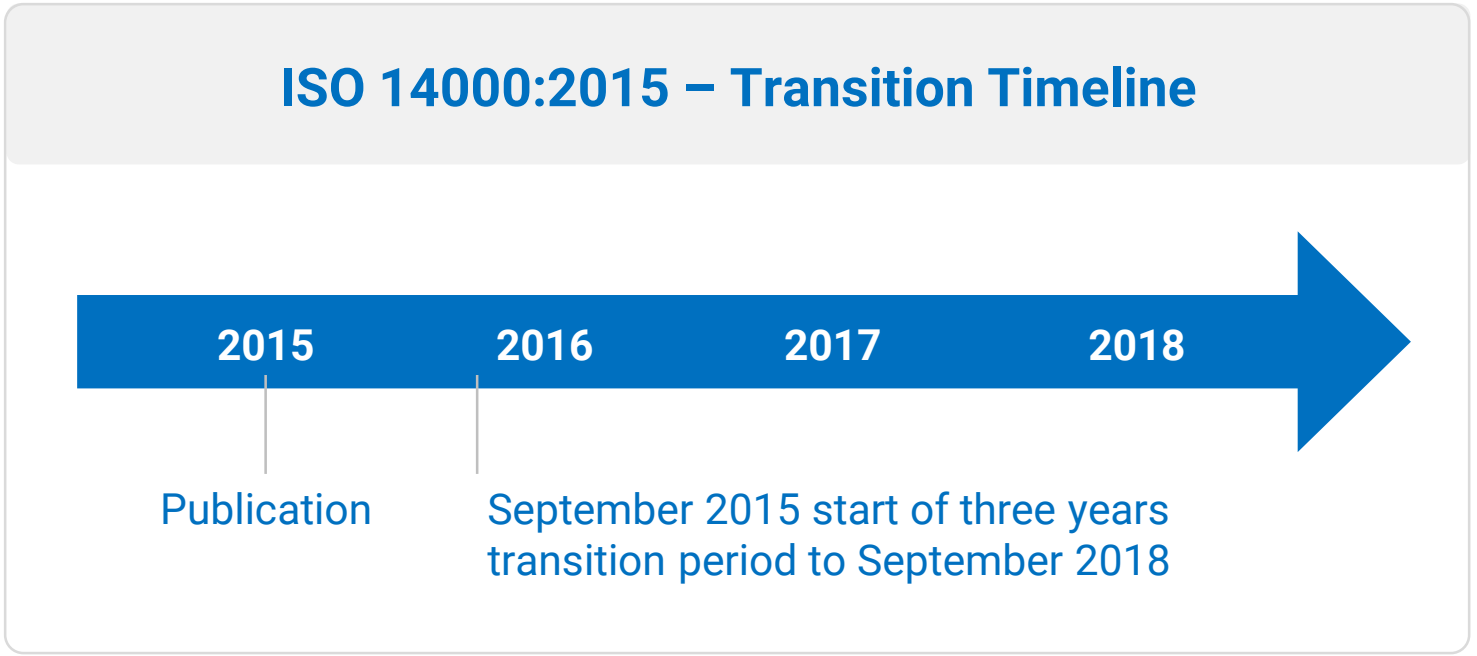
Compliance obligation

The new term "compliance obligation" has replaced the phrase: “legal requirements and other requirements to which the organization subscribes.” There are two kinds of compliance obligations: mandatory compliance obligations and voluntary compliance obligations. Mandatory compliance obligations include laws and regulations while voluntary compliance obligations include contractual commitments, community and industry standards, ethical codes of conduct, and good governance guidelines.

Other clarifications and modifications

Transition period

Companies certified against the 2004 revision of ISO 14001 must transition to the new version by September 2018. Lead certification bodies stopped certification against the 2004 revision on September 2016, which means that now the only alternative is to prepare for certification using the 2015 revision.



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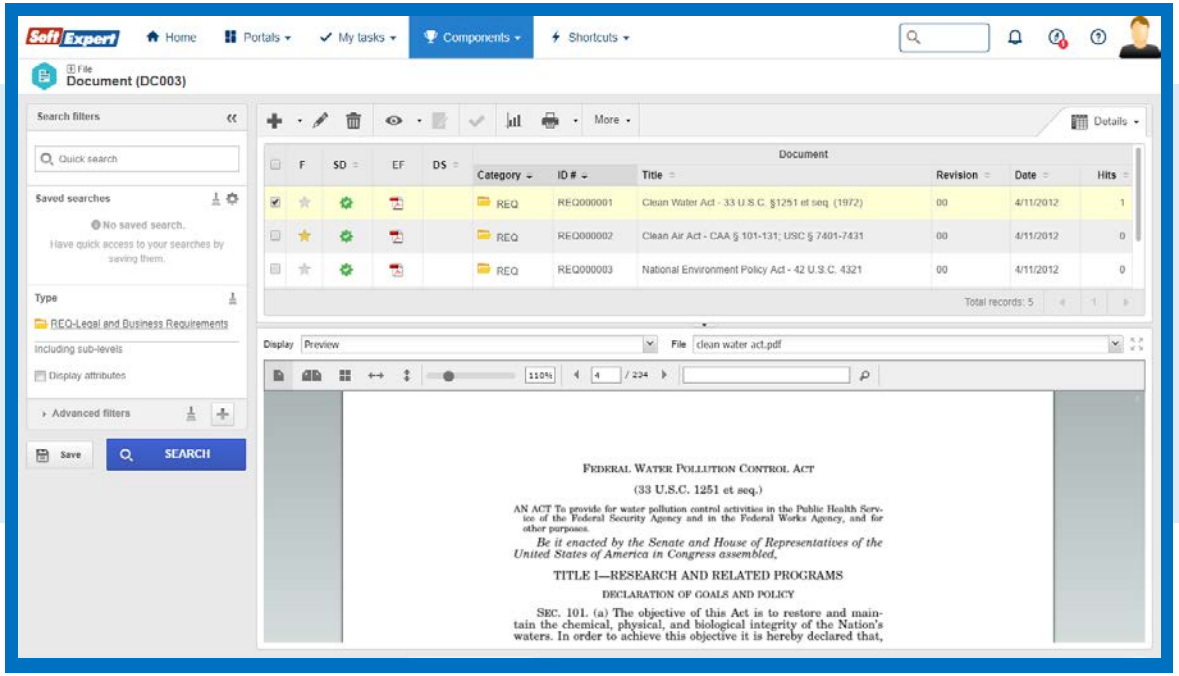
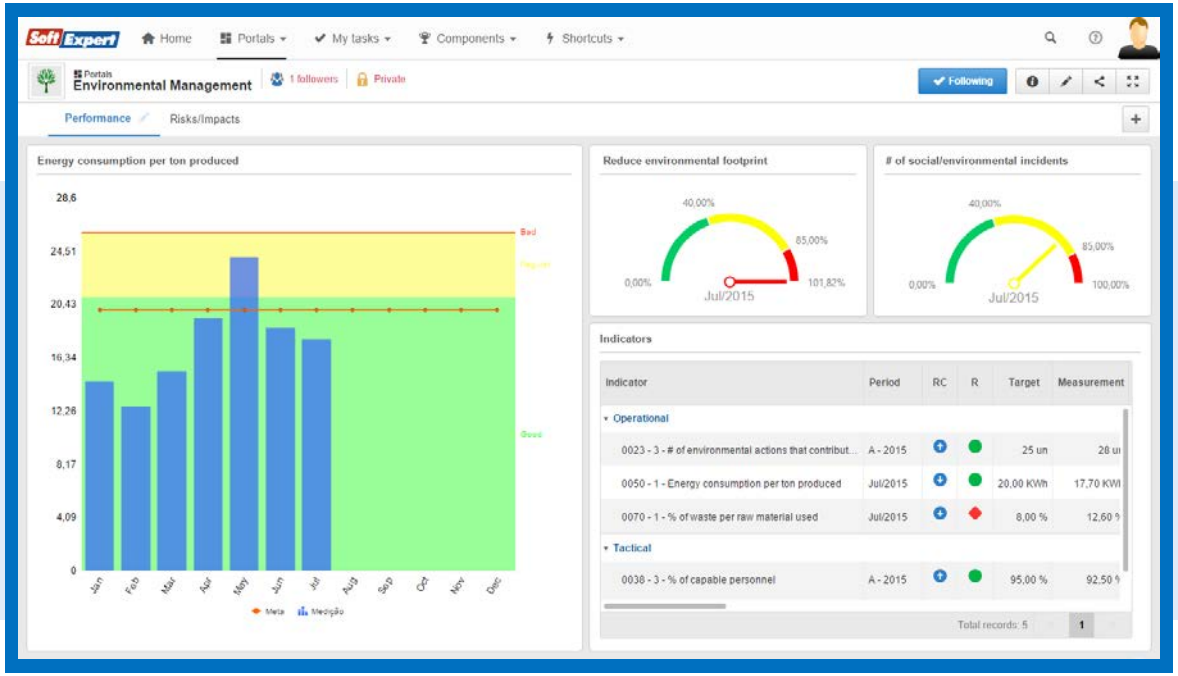
SoftExpert Excellence Suite

SoftExpert offers the most advanced and comprehensive software solution for compliance management that meets the stringent needs of various global regulations. SoftExpert Excellence Suite (SE Suite) helps companies adhere to ISO 14001:2015 while lowering the costs of compliance, maximizing success, increasing productivity and reducing risks.

SoftExpert provides a complete, fully web-based solution that simplifies the control of processes, products and services, environmental aspects and impacts, legal and other requirements, documents, records and audits. It is a comprehensive solution that covers all the requirements determined by the ISO 14000 family and related regulations.

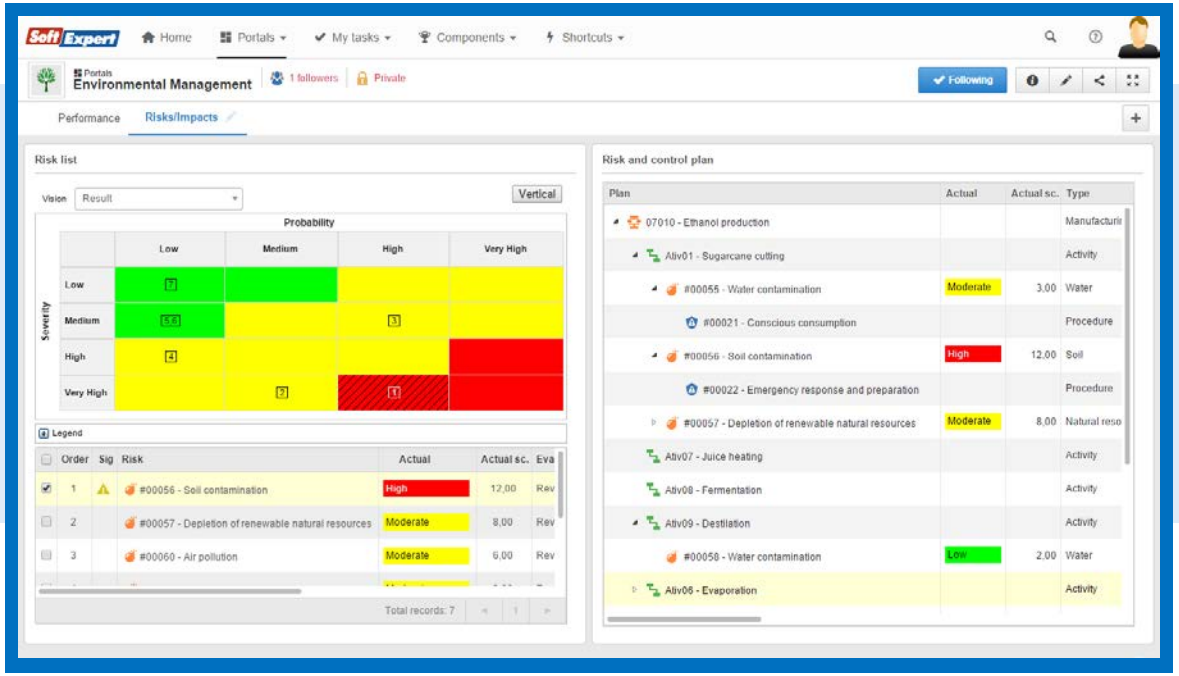
Documentation control

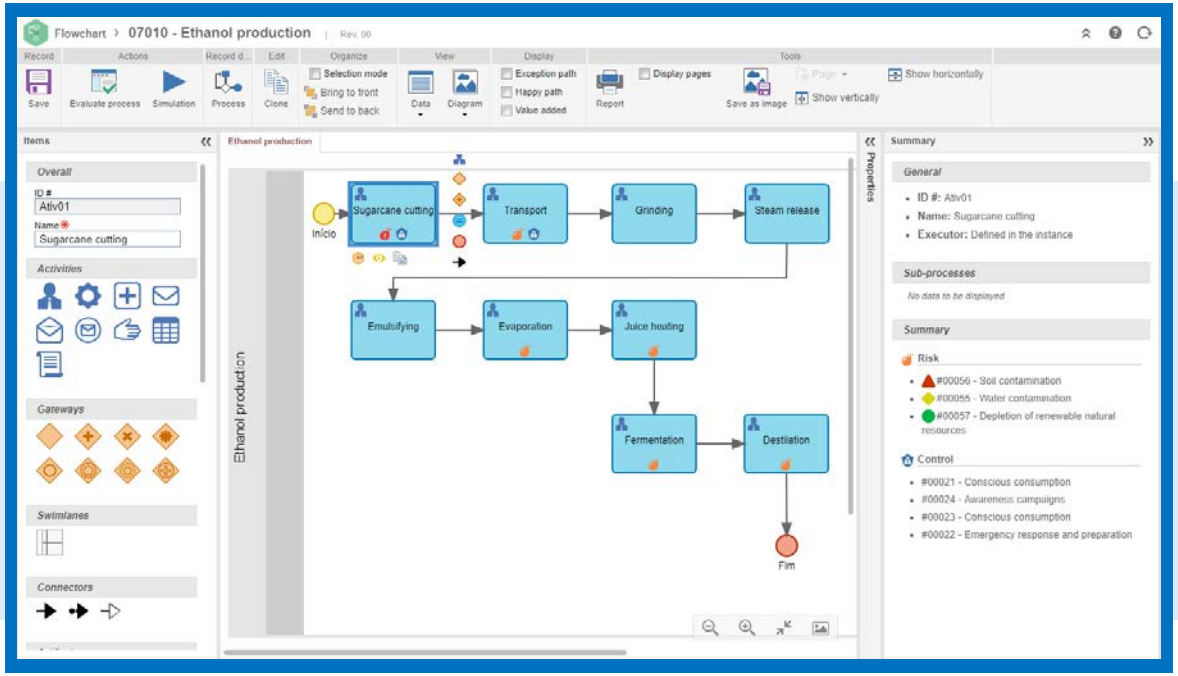




Environmental performance

Risks and impacts monitoring





Process and lifecycle

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About SoftExpert

SoftExpert is a market leader in software and services for enterprise-wide business process improvement and compliance management, providing the most comprehensive application suite to empower organizations to increase business performance at all levels and to maximize industry-mandated compliance and corporate governance programs.

Founded in 1995 and currently with more than 2,000 customers and 300,000 users worldwide, SoftExpert solutions are used by leading corporations in all kinds of industries, including manufacturing, automotive, life sciences, food and beverage, mining and metals, oil and gas, high-tech and IT, energy and utilities, government and public sector, financial services, transportation and logistics, healthcare, and many others.

SoftExpert, along with its extensive network of international partners, provides hosting, implementation, post-sales support and validation services for all solutions to ensure that customers get the maximum value from their investments.

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