ISO 14001

Awareness Briefing

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Achieving a balance between the environment, society and the economy is considered essential to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Sustainable development is a goal achieved by balancing the three pillars of sustainability: the environment, society and the economy.

Organisations, whether public or private, large or small, in developed or in emerging economies, have an impact on the environment and can be affected by the environment in return. There is a growing understanding that human development and well-being are contingent on preserving and conserving our natural resources, upon which all human activity and productivity depend. Achieving sound environmental performance requires organisational commitment to a systematic approach and to continual improvement of an environmental management system.

Societal expectations are driving the need for improved management of the resources necessary to support human development, through greater efficiency, transparency and accountability for all organisations. There are growing pressures on the environment from climate change, over-consumption of resources and the challenges created by degradation of ecosystems and the loss of biodiversity.

The aim of ISO 14001 is to provide organisations with guidance for a common framework, in order to establish, implement, maintain and continually improve a system to support better environmental management. This environmental management framework should contribute to the long-term success of the organisation and to the overall goal of sustainable development. The framework of a robust, credible and reliable environmental management system is shown in Figure 1. It includes:

- understanding the context in which the organisation operates
- determining and understanding the relevant needs and expectations of interested parties, as they relate to the Management System of the organisation
- establishing and implementing an environmental policy and objectives
- top management taking a leading role in improving environmental performance
- identifying aspects of the organisation's activities, products and services that can result in significant environmental impacts
- identifying the environmental conditions, including events, that can affect the organisation
- considering the organisation's risks and opportunities that need to be addressed in relation to its environmental aspects, compliance obligations, and other issues and requirements
- increasing awareness of the organisation's interaction with the environment
- establishing operational controls, as appropriate, to manage the organisation's significant environmental aspects and compliance obligations, and risks and opportunities that need to be addressed
- evaluating environmental performance and taking actions, as necessary, for its improvement.

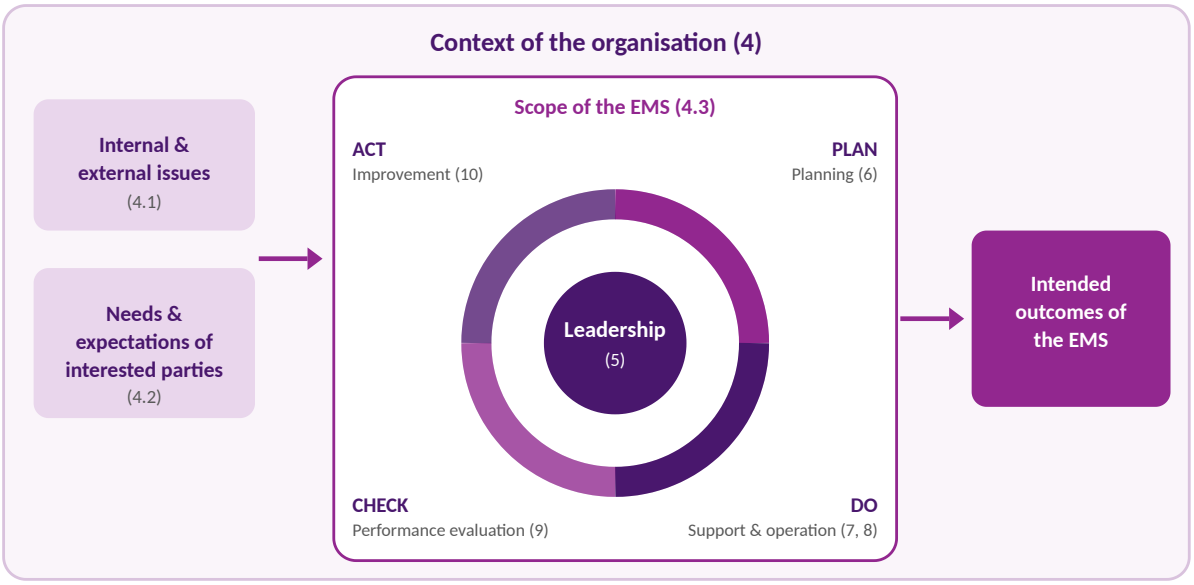


Figure 1 – Environmental management system (Plan–Do–Check–Act)

The outcomes of a systematic approach to environmental management can provide top management with quantitative and qualitative data that enables informed business decisions that build long-term success and create options for contributing to sustainable development. The success of the Management System depends on commitment from all levels and functions of the organisation, led by top management. The opportunities include:

- protecting the environment, including the prevention or reduction of adverse environmental impacts
- controlling or influencing the way products and services are designed, manufactured, distributed, used and disposed of
- using a life-cycle perspective to prevent environmental impacts from being unintentionally shifted elsewhere within the cycle
- achieving financial and operational benefits that can result from implementing environmentally sound alternatives which strengthen the organisation's market position
- communicating environmental information to relevant interested parties.