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Photocaption: Cedrec's Richard Clarke is urging companies to start to prepare now for ISO 14001 revisions

Cautious welcome for ISO 14001 revised standard draft agreement

News that the revision to the ISO 14001 international standard has been approved for final draft status has been given a cautious welcome by Cedrec.

However, the online legislation specialist is also voicing concerns over its implementation and is urging businesses to start preparing now for its likely impact.

Strong support from ISO member bodies for the draft standard has seen the revision move towards the final approval stage. But this agreement is in contrast to the views of environmental professionals who will be charged with implementing the revised standard.

Research conducted by Cedrec back in August revealed that there is significant uncertainty about the impact of the new standard on management system operations.

It showed that nearly two-thirds (62%) of environmental professionals don't know how the changes will affect their management systems.

Commenting on the draft standard, Richard Clarke, senior consultant at Cedrec, said: "While the new version of ISO 14001 represents a significant change in the requirements of the standard, it's clear that many environmental managers remain unsure what this will mean.

"So, the sooner ISO can adopt the standard as a final version; the sooner work can begin in assessing the changes that will need to be made to conform to the range of revised requirements."

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Richard Clarke is also concerned that changes to legal compliance requirements may contribute to fundamental modifications to regulation in the future, adding:

"The revision includes changes to the legal compliance requirements which are set against a background of discussions between the regulator and accreditation bodies around changes in the extent of regulatory control.

"While a revised 14001 supporting an enhanced legal compliance process is welcome, businesses need to know precisely what this will mean."

He points to the SNIFFER project report (April 2011) on "Improving environmental compliance outcomes" which illustrated that there is a significant variation in outcomes between third party audit and regulatory inspections with respect to legal compliance.

Although the final version of the ISO standard is expected in Q3/2015 and businesses will have up to three years to migrate to the new requirements, Richard Clarke believes that businesses need to consider impacts as soon as possible and is urging them to act today.

"If the regulatory model is to change and businesses' environmental management systems form the basis of assurance of compliance, then big changes will be needed in many organisations" says Richard Clarke.

"That process needs to start as soon as possible as part of ongoing evaluation of compliance within existing systems in readiness for the change to come."

Expert advice on the impact of recent and upcoming changes to environmental legislation will be available from Cedrec at its new 2015 UK-wide roadshow. These will help organisations understand better the impact they have on businesses as well as offering one-

on-one support on a range of legal compliance and management system issues, including the revision to ISO 14001.

Cedrec specialises in providing public and private sector organisations with help and advice in understanding, interpreting and complying with environmental and safety legislation. The company offers a range of specialist consultancy and subscriptions services. More at www.cedrec.com

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