

BRIEFING: STANDARDS

Revised quality and environment standards will drive improvements in construction

ISO 9001, the international standard for quality management systems, and the related ISO 14001 environmental management standard have recently been revised. Sally Swingewood and Anthony Burd of BSI discuss the implications for construction.

The construction industry has had a long and successful relationship with the ISO 9001 standard for quality management systems since it first appeared in 1987. The latest 2015 revision, which was published in September (BSI, 2015a) – along with a revised version of its sister environmental management standard ISO 14001 (BSI, 2105b) – are likely to have a significant impact in the sector.

Certification to ISO 9001, which is now the world's leading quality management system standard, is required for any construction company working on a UK government contract. It is also a condition of membership in many professional bodies and is widely used in the construction supply chain.

Greater management responsibility

ISO 9001:2015 looks considerably different to the previous 2008 edition. However, this should not alarm those responsible for quality management systems since many of the requirements they are used to meeting are still there.

The new requirements will bring benefits to all construction businesses by ensuring that those at the top of the company integrate quality into the wider business strategy and are held accountable for the effectiveness of the quality management system.

Whereas a company might choose to retain the role of quality manager to ensure that the quality management system is effectively established and implemented, senior managers can no longer hold that person solely responsible for system failures: they must ensure the system works and that those involved at any level have the tools needed to do the job.

Ensuring quality in the supply chain

The new edition of ISO 9001 also takes into account the complexity of supply chains and known risk areas such as the quality of key products and services provided by contractors and subcontractors.

Although the standard already extends a long way down most construction supply chains, there can still be issues when production of a certificate of compliance is used as an alternative to checks and measures. Just because a product or service provider says it will consistently do what is expected does not mean it actually will.

Any organisation claiming compliance needs to identify all externally-sourced products and services that can affect quality performance, and define process

controls and related checks to ensure processes are carried out properly. These measures cascade down the supply chain, through each ISO 9001-certified company, so problems can be identified and corrected early on.

Environmental management standard

With environmental issues being increasingly important in construction, many companies are also now certifying their environmental management systems to ISO 14001. Both ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 use the same risk-based structure and base requirements, making for easier implementation and auditing.

By complying with ISO 9001's base requirements, an organisation will also be closer to meeting the requirements for ISO 14001 – as well as asset management standard ISO 55001 (BSI, 2014) and information security standard ISO 27001 (BSI, 2013). Occupational health and safety management standards are also likely follow this structure within the next 18 months, with development of a new ISO standard currently underway.

In short, the construction industry should not fear a revolution with the 2015 revisions of ISO 9001 and ISO 14001, and instead look forward to an evolution which will enable them to deliver even greater value to their clients.

References

- BSI (2013) BS ISO/IEC 27001:2013: Information technology. Security techniques. Information security management systems. Requirements. BSI, London, UK.
- BSI (2014) BS ISO 55001:2014: Asset management. Management systems. Requirements. BSI, London, UK.
- BSI (2015a) BS EN ISO 9001:2015: Quality management systems. Requirements. BSI, London, UK.
- BSI (2015b) BS EN ISO 14001:2015: Environmental management systems. Requirements. BSI, London, UK.



The new 2015 version of ISO 9001 will help set new standards for quality in the construction industry