



Frequently Asked Questions about ISO 14001 Registration

While third party registration may be common in industry, it is a relatively new concept for public entities. The PEER Center has gathered the questions most commonly posed about ISO 14001 registration and asked a registrar to answer them for you. Questions are organized in a “Before,” “During,” and “After Registration” format:

Before Registration.....

Q. What is the difference between the terms “registration” and “certification?”

A. In common usage and even in publications, the terms are used interchangeably. Scholars may make the distinction that you “register” a management system and “certify” to a product standard but this distinction is rarely noted in the world of ISO 14001. Even the Standard refers to “certification/registration.”

Q. Who is RAB and what is their role in registration?

A. RAB stands for the Registrar Accreditation Board. The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and RAB have joined to form the National Accreditation Program (NAP) for ISO 14001 and 9000. The NAP also covers the accreditation of providers offering the 36-hour Lead EMS Auditor course. Certification programs for both EMS and QMS auditors are operated solely by RAB, separate from the NAP.

RAB, headquartered in Milwaukee, WI, is a not-for-profit organization that is financially self-supported and governed by a 15-member board of directors. Members of the board represent both quality and environmental stakeholders and include technical experts, business executives, industry representatives, and employees of registrar organizations.

Q. How can I find out who the accredited registrars are?

A. The RAB website at www.rabnet.com contains a list of accredited registrars.

Q. What are the steps in registration?

A. Terminology used to describe the registration process can be confusing since registrars and companies use different terms for the same steps. Let’s begin with what RAB says the steps must be:

Stage 1: This first stage has several goals; 1) planning for the audit, 2) gaining an understanding of the EMS in the context of significant environmental aspects, and 3) gauging your organization’s preparedness for the audit. In addition to a document review, a visit to your site is required.

Variations: Registrars may perform all of Stage 1 on site or divide it into a document or desk audit and a pre-assessment or readiness review.

Stage 2: This Stage is always performed at your location. The objective is to evaluate the implementation of your EMS.

Q. In the registration process, are there requirements beyond ISO 14001 that I have to meet?

A. Yes, there are but this is not a drawback. The requirements strengthen the credibility of the third-party registration process (as opposed to self-declaration). First, you will be audited to the goals, objectives, and procedures you have set for your organization even if they go beyond what ISO 14001 requires (and they often do). You will also have to meet the rules of your registrar in such important areas as confidentiality of audit results and dispute resolution. Fortunately, accredited registrars are required to have procedures or policies which address these specific areas and many other areas of interaction with their clients. It may be beneficial to ask for a copy of your registrar's EMS registration policy.

Q. What if I do not like the audit team or team leader?

A. RAB says that your registrar must inform you of the names of your audit team members in time for you to appeal against the appointment of any particular auditor. So, if for some reason, you do not feel like the assigned auditor is the right one for your organization, let your registrar know as soon as possible.

Q. Is there a difference in how a public entity is audited for registration vs. industry?

A. The answer is yes and no. No, the formal process with Stage 1 and 2 is exactly the same for both sectors. However, on the practical side, planning the registration audit for a public entity *is* different from the planning for, let's say, an auto assembly plant. Public entities are not as straightforward as a manufacturing site and there is wide variation in how public entities are structured and managed. A cookie cutter approach to registration will not work. With public entities, more effort is often required in planning for the audit, working with you to determine the scope of registration, and then in determining the logistics of executing the audit.

During Registration.....

Q. What happens if I disagree with a finding made by the registrar?

A. As noted above, accredited registrars are required to have procedures or policies to address dispute resolution. Ask your registrar about this process before the audit begins.

Q. What happens if the auditor finds a regulatory noncompliance during the registration audit?

A. Good question! First of all, it does not mean that you have automatically failed the audit. If your registrar identifies a noncompliance, RAB says that you may still become registered if your EMS addresses such noncompliances and when taken into consideration, the noncompliances do not indicate a major nonconformance with ISO 14001 requirements.

Your accredited registrar is required to have methods for handling and reporting any discoveries of noncompliance so be sure to ask how they would handle this situation if it arises. In the real world of ISO 14001 registrations, identifying a regulatory noncompliance does not happen nearly as often as people fear it will.

After Registration.....

Q. Once I am registered, what is next? Are surveillances required?

A. The required surveillances after you achieve registration is another strength of the third-party system. Surveillance helps to ensure that your EMS stays in conformance with ISO 14001 and that it is continually improving. Under RAB's requirements you have two options for surveillances:

1. A 6-month surveillance cycle with no re-audit after 3 years, or
2. An annual surveillance with a re-audit after 3 years.

With either option, the number of audit days/year is the same, except for the re-audit. For example, you can choose to have your auditor on site for two days once a year or for one day twice a year. There are pros and cons for each option.

Q. Can I lose my registration?

A. Yes you can, but it is unlikely if you work to maintain your EMS and have regular surveillances.

Please forward any other questions you have to Jeff DuTeau at jduteau@getf.org.



Responses are provided courtesy of NSF-International Strategic Registration, www.nsf-isr.org. 1-888-NSF-9000.