

Best Practice Guide

# Sailing Calmer Seas: Navigate Your ISO 45001 Journey With Ease.

For anyone who's entertained the idea of ISO 45001 certification, it's not a decision to be taken lightly. While companies can expect enormous benefits through certification to the ISO 45001 health & safety management system standard, the entire process, if not effectively planned, resourced and executed, can be quite overwhelming, not to mention disruptive and costly to your business.

Yet, when executed properly, a full-functioning health & safety management system aligned to the ISO 45001 standard can provide a framework for sustainable safety excellence and a strong and progressive safety culture.

This best practice guide was designed to offer interested organizations some "tips and tricks" to support their efforts to stand-up and maintain an effective ISO 45001 health & safety management system. While not exhaustive in its content, this guide will outline the things to consider when embarking on your own ISO 45001 journey.

# Getting Started

Before we jump in feet first, let's briefly review what ISO 45001 is, why it's required, and what benefits you can expect from a management system aligned to its elements:

## What is ISO 45001?

ISO 45001:2018 is a voluntary international standard published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The standard creates a common set of requirements for the development, maintenance and continual improvement of an occupational health & safety management system. Its overall objective is to enable any organization, regardless of its location, type, size or activities, to create a management system to sustainably address operational risk, prevent occupational injury and illness, and provide opportunities to continually improve safety performance.

With businesses continuing to expand globally, an international standard for occupational health & safety management systems will provide a consistent benchmark to help companies manage health & safety risk and reduce and eliminate injuries and deaths, regardless where they are doing business. And since ISO 45001 is inherently flexible, organizations can adjust it to meet their unique business needs and challenges, as well as local regulatory landscapes in the jurisdictions in which they operate.

## Why is ISO 45001 required?

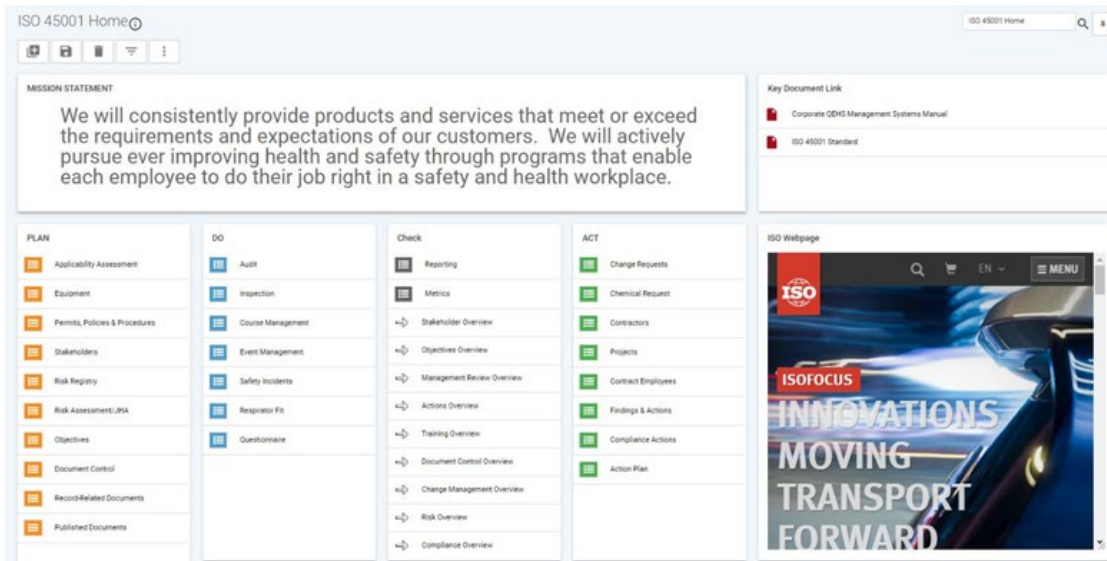
Despite the increased attention placed on occupational health & safety over the past 20 years, occupational injuries and illnesses continue to have a devastating impact on workers and their families worldwide.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) reports that an estimated 2.8 million people lose their lives at work each year<sup>1</sup> – **this translates to roughly 1 work fatality every 15 seconds**. And despite a significant reduction in the rate of non-fatal occupational incidents in many nations over the past two decades, research suggests that these efforts have not contributed to a similar reduction in workplace deaths, with fatality rates remaining flat or even increasing in recent years<sup>2</sup>.

The impact of these losses isn't solely felt by the victim's family and friends. ILO estimates that the economic burden of workplace fatalities accounts for nearly 4% of global GDP annually. And as interest in sustainability and ESG initiatives grows globally, organizations able to demonstrate how they are managing risk and ensuring the safety of their workforce and communities will be better positioned to secure investment, recruit top talent and strengthen their financial performance in the long-term.

<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO). 2013. The Prevention of Occupational Diseases

<sup>2</sup> EU Eurostat Fatal Accidents at work by NACE, Rev 2 activity; US. BLS. Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 2008-2017



### What benefits does ISO 45001 offer?

With or without a certified management system, organizations have a moral and legal duty to protect workers from injuries and ill health. Studies have shown that employers who lead in H&S performance often show strong and sustainable financial performance as well. Below are just 6 key benefits that organizations can expect by implementing ISO 45001:

1. Lower operating costs
2. Better risk management
3. Improved compliance
4. Stronger relationships
5. Greater customer satisfaction
6. Enhanced social responsibility & governance

### What is the ISO 45001 migration deadline?

When ISO 45001 was first released in March 2018, organizations and accreditation bodies were given three (3) years to migrate their existing certifications, namely OHSAS 18001 or its country-specific equivalents, to the new ISO standard. That transition period is scheduled to end on September 30, 2021.

With the deadline fast approaching, now is not the time for complacency. Without proper planning, organizations may quickly find that their preparation period has elapsed, and they're at-risk of losing their certification status, impacting their ability to bid or service key markets, and/or forced to undergo a much more extensive, and potentially costly, re-certification process.

# Setting Yourself Up for Success

**To help reduce effort and uncertainty, we've outlined 5 best practices that organizations should consider when embarking on any ISO 45001 implementation project.**

## **Best Practice #1: Familiarize yourself with the standard**

Before charting a course in any direction, it's best to purchase a copy of the standard and read it. Then read it again. And again. But all joking aside – the ISO 45001 is quite comprehensive and building a management system that conforms to it means that you must develop a thorough understanding of its requirements. This may require reviewing the standard frequently, so plan to invest the time in this first step. You may even want to translate the standard in a more straight-forward and simplified “language” to lessen confusion and direct people toward the things they need to do and what they can control.

For those organizations lacking internal expertise in ISO 45001 or challenged to decode some of the standard's more esoteric requirements, you may benefit from enrolling in external training courses or engaging consultants to strengthen your ability to understand and seamlessly navigate the document. But don't keep this information to yourself. Train your internal staff regularly to ensure they understand what's expected, and can actively contribute to the success of the project.



## Best Practice #2: Secure organizational support early

ISO 45001 is not for the faint-hearted. It is a considerable amount of work, and a considerable investment for the business. So, you shouldn't start down the path unless you've secured the support from critical stakeholders at the outset. Not doing so will likely fast-track your project down the path to failure. But who do you need in your corner? Let's take a quick look:

- 1. Senior Leadership:** It's critical that you find an executive sponsor and engage them early on. Sell the idea of ISO 45001 to that individual first, painting a clear picture of its expected value to the business. A committed sponsor will help advocate the project at the executive level, push for budget and resources, fast-track approvals, and help to remove barriers to progress. Since senior leadership "sets the tone" for the rest of the enterprise, engaging this group early will send a very clear signal that ISO 45001 is a priority and an essential lever to realize safety excellence.
- 2. Employees:** While top management commitment for your ISO 45001 project is critical, you mustn't forget about the employees residing on the lower branches of the organizational tree. It's this group that will arguably be most impacted by ISO 45001, and if rolled out effectively, will benefit most from its use.

Worker consultation and participation is a key pillar of the standard. An effective management system requires that you create mechanisms that help to engage the workforce in decision-making, solicit feedback and ideas, and offer opportunities for those individuals to become actively involved in critical health & safety activities. Engaging employees (and even contractors) early and often in the project, through regular meetings, communications, as well as gap analyses or audit activities will help foster a stronger sense of trust between the C-suite and the front line, and will help build the worker ownership of the health & safety program needed to sustain it over time.

**Key idea:** Create a cross-functional implementation team, comprised of both managers and employees across multiple departments to oversee the ISO 45001 project. There's no better way to build ownership across the business than getting workers involved at the start.

- 3. Consultants:** For those businesses lacking the internal expertise or resources to implement ISO 45001, or struggling to create a compelling business case for senior leadership, consider engaging an external consultant. Consultants with real-world experience with successful ISO 45001 projects can often offer compelling arguments and case studies to help quantify the expected value of ISO 45001, as well as assist in building and executing a clear project plan. Just remember that consultants aren't free, so you'll need to factor that into your budget estimation when engaging with your executive sponsor.

Recall that the standard requires that the business considers the "needs, expectations and interests" of its stakeholders when defining the scope and processes of its management system. The earlier we can bring these critical stakeholders on side, the better our chances for a successful ISO 45001 project.

### Best Practice #3: Assess where you are, and where you want to go

Armed with your new knowledge of the standard and with the support of key stakeholders, the next step is to determine how you plan to build a management system that conforms to the requirements of ISO 45001.

It's important to note that no two ISO 45001 implementations will be the same. Each company's management system will be specific to its operating context, its environment, its strategic goals and ambitions, and the needs of its stakeholders. It also means that each organization's path to stand-up their management system will be unique.

That's why it's best to start your journey by undertaking a **gap analysis**. This process will enable your business to assess current versus desired states: what parts of the system are already compliant, what pieces are missing and need to be created, and where do deficiencies currently exist that need to be corrected. Moreover, the gap analysis will provide a gauge on the degree of effort and resources (i.e. time and money) required to bring current operations into alignment with the standard.

### Best Practice #4: Plan your paper trail

"If it wasn't written down, it didn't happen". We've all heard that saying, but it couldn't be closer to the truth when it comes to ISO 45001. For businesses seeking certification to the standard, documentation will be a critical output. External auditors will want to see proof that the things that you say you're doing are actually being done. In the standard, this proof is referred to as "documented information".

Generally, documented information consists of two parts: documents and records. Documents provide *evidence of intention* – policies and procedures that explain what the organization has directed must be done under specific circumstances. Records, on the other hand, represent *evidence of action*. During a certification audit, an external auditor will first assess that your company's policies and procedures are aligned to the specific clauses and requirements of the standard. If the standard states you need a policy for "x", you need to show that you have one. Once verified, the auditor will look for records to show that your business is actually following that policy or procedure as it is written. Both parts are necessary to demonstrate conformance.

Many organizations, unfortunately, commit the fatal mistake of failing to collect enough "documented information" to serve as evidence that their management system conforms to ISO 45001. It's imperative that when crafting the policies, procedures and processes of your management system, consider what documented information you'll need to show to satisfy an auditor. Some sections of the standard are quite explicit with respect to evidence; in others you'll need to exercise your judgment.



## Best Practice #5 – Leverage health & safety software

It's likely fair to say that managing ISO 45001 is not the only thing you're responsible for. Consequently, tools that help you cut through the clutter and focus on what's most important will be immensely useful to maintain an effective and efficient management system, and maximize your efforts in the process.

In our experience, clients working to implement ISO 45001 in their business frequently struggle with the following challenges:

- 1. Heavy administration burdens:** As mentioned earlier, ISO 45001 requires that organizations maintain sufficient documented information to demonstrate conformance. Yet often, businesses find that the level of documentation required to sustain the management system is incredibly onerous and resource-intensive, especially when it's all on paper. Trying to manage the "mountain of paper" needed is enough for many businesses to give up on ISO 45001.
- 2. Workload demands:** ISO 45001 encourages firms to integrate health & safety in all aspects of their business, including those elements it controls and over which it has influence. The need to manage multiple elements simultaneously can be extremely challenging, especially if the business relies heavily on manual, paper-based tools and simple spreadsheets. It also means it's easy for something to be missed in the "daily whirlwind" and fall through the cracks, compromising your ability to keep the management system on the tracks.
- 3. Keeping Accurate Information:** Managing risk effectively requires that the information on which we base our decisions and prioritize actions is up-to-date, timely and accurate. We not only need to stay apprised of our outputs, but we must keep tabs on changes to our operating context, and what effect those changes may have on the management system. And the process to research, review, assess and update key information, such as regulatory changes, is often manual, error-prone, and pulls resources away from other critical tasks. Similarly, tracking down individuals to get updates on tasks or to measure performance is often inefficient and problematic.
- 4. Lack of Available Insights:** Continuous health & safety improvement is predicated on the availability (and visibility) of insights to tell us where risk is emerging, what risks must be prioritized, and where our limited resources would be best utilized. While H&S management systems result in businesses collecting vast amounts of data, if that data cannot be easily transformed into real-time insights to guide decision-making, one of the clearest advantages of ISO 45001 is lost. And manual systems to manage ISO 45001 often struggle to provide those insights in a quick and reliable manner.

The frustration, time and cost of dealing with these challenges is often the catalyst that encourages businesses to explore [cloud-based enterprise health & safety software](#) as a way to simplify and derive greater value from their management system.



## Benefits of digitally transforming your management system

Here are just some of the immediate benefits you'll realize when investing in EHSQ software for your ISO 45001 management system:

**Improved data visibility:** EHSQ software enables users to pull relevant data and metrics into a centralized area, and business intelligence tools make it easier to produce and share insights from data that help identify priorities, threats and guide data-driven decision making. Access to better data also helps the business understand with greater certainty whether their efforts are leading to continual H&S performance improvement.

**Reduced administration:** Integrated workflows and mobile digital tools in software solutions allow information to be shared in real-time, reducing the need to chase people for updates, and making it easier to assign tasks or access information at your fingertips. Reducing administration frees staff up to manage more critical items and reduces overall inefficiency and cost.

**Connects people with data:** Digital solutions offer organizations the ability to connect people with the information they need, where they need it, to manage risk in their work, or provide updates on progress, without additional effort or secondary data entry, and reducing the time lag between when an issue is reported and when action is taken.

**Balanced workloads:** Through integrations with third-party solutions, software can help automate and/or offload tasks required as part of ISO 45001, reducing workloads of critical staff. Software can even help deconstruct complex requirements into tangible compliance actions that can be assigned, tracked and reported on to ensure activities needed to demonstrate conformance are actually happening.

**Removes silos:** Issues with non-conformance often arise when information is not readily shared between departments. Through workflow integration and automated notifications, software helps reduce the chances of changes in one area of the business that could impact safety going unnoticed, and leading to harm elsewhere.

**Simplifies implementation & audit:** EHSQ software can drastically reduce the time and effort associated with implementing an ISO 45001 system, and provides a strong, reliable audit trail to ensure a streamlined and effective audit / certification process.

While there's no one preferred way to implement ISO 45001, following the 5 best practices outlined in this guide will help you build the foundation that your business will need to navigate this process effectively, and build a management system that safeguards your employees and your bottom line.

## Create a solid foundation for success.

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