

# PECB

*When Recognition Matters*



## DOCUMENTATION HIERARCHY BASED ON ISO 14001

Globally, ISO 14001 is the most recognized international standard for environmental management systems and also one of the most used standards. This standard has been developed to be applied to a range of sectors, and by implementing this standard, the organizations will have a lot of benefits. ISO 14001 provides a framework through which the organizations can deliver environmental performance improvement respecting the environmental policy commitments.

An Environmental Management System requires from the organizations to develop a documentation system in order to collect, analyze, register, and retrieve information. One of the most important parts of the EMS implementation in the organization is the development of the documentation and record control system based on ISO 14001. By developing a documentation and record control system, the organization will define the method of creating, publishing, withdrawing, and also using the documents and records. The standards allow the organization to create the most appropriate documentation for their needs.

## WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS BASED ON ISO 14001?

Before starting to develop the EMS documentation, it is very important for each organization to understand well the purpose of each type of documents, and their application in the documentation hierarchy.

There are different types of documents used to establish an EMS including the policy, manual, procedures, work instructions, several guidelines or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), records and forms.

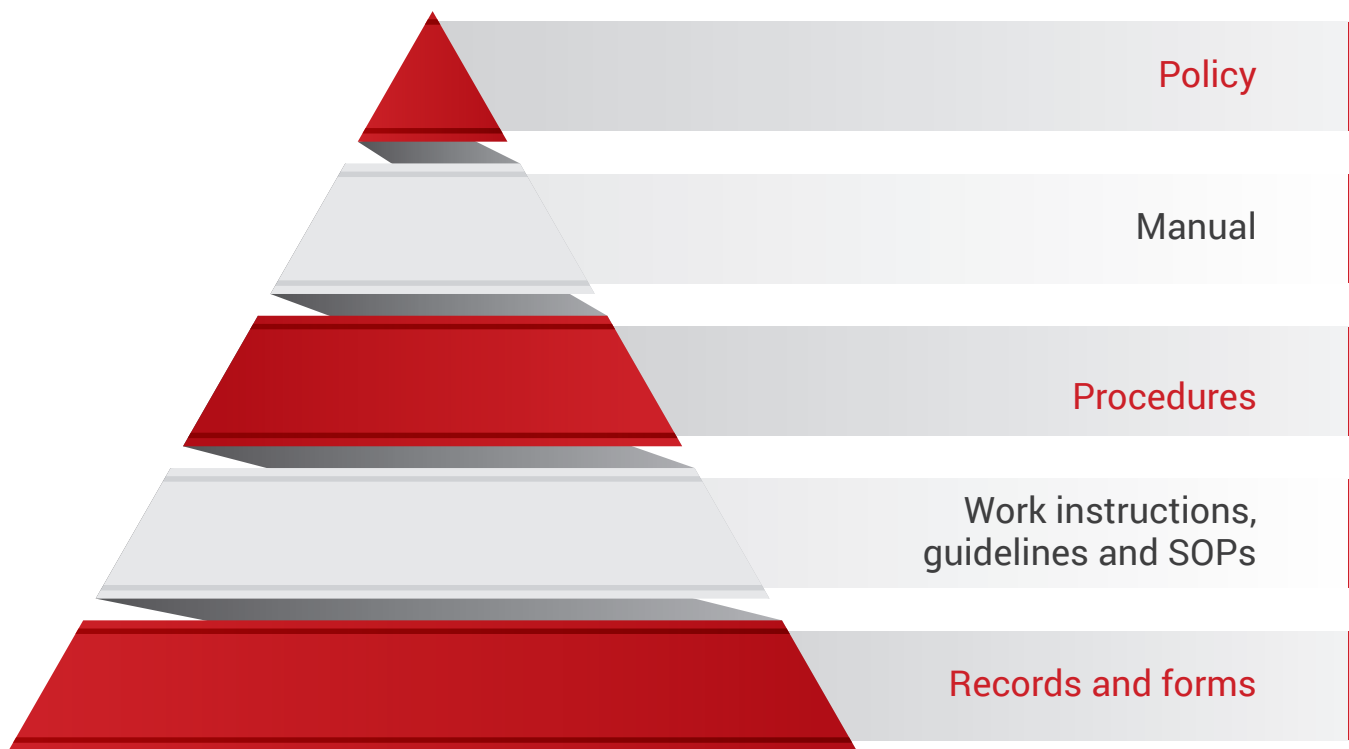


Figure1: Documentation hierarchy

Usually, the implementation of the standards starts the introduction with the development of documentation; thus, people are often confused about the importance of the document and don't know how to prioritize them. However, the easiest way to determine the hierarchy is to see who writes the document, who is the document intended for, and what is the purpose of the document. For instance, when a document was written by the top management, this document comes first in the hierarchy, but if the document is filled by the employee, in the hierarchy the document is found on the bottom of the pyramid.



## **BASED ON ISO 14001, HOW SHOULD THE EMS DOCUMENTATION BE STRUCTURED?**

ISO 14001 (Environmental Management System) standard requires different documentation from the organizations.

So, the list of the mandatory documents includes at least the following:

- ▶ Scope of the EMS (clause 1)
- ▶ Environmental Policy (clause 5.2)
- ▶ Environmental aspects (clause 6.1.2)
- ▶ Environmental objectives and planning to achieve them (clause 6.2)
- ▶ Operational planning and control (clause 8.1)
- ▶ Emergency preparedness and response (clause 8.2)

Additionally, the mandatory records include at least the following:

- ▶ Compliance obligations (clause 6.1.3)
- ▶ Competence (clause 7.2)
- ▶ Communication (clause 7.4)
- ▶ Monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation (clause 9.1)
- ▶ Internal audit (clause 9.2)
- ▶ Internal audit programme (clause 9.2.2)
- ▶ Management review (clause 9.3)
- ▶ Nonconformity and corrective actions (clause 10.2)

Also, there are numerous non-mandatory documents to be used for ISO 14001 implementation. The list of non-mandatory documents includes at least the following:

- ▶ Understanding the organization and its context (A.4.1)
- ▶ Understanding the needs and expectations of interested parties (A.4.2)
- ▶ Procedure for identification and evaluation of environmental aspects and risks (clause 6.1.1 and 6.1.2)
- ▶ Competence, training and awareness procedures (clause 7.2 and 7.3)
- ▶ Procedure for communication (clause 7.4)
- ▶ Procedure for document and record control (clause 7.5)
- ▶ Procedure for internal audit (clause 9.2)
- ▶ Procedure for management review (clause 9.3)
- ▶ Procedure for management of non-conformities and corrective actions (clause 10.2)



During the design of the EMS documentation, the organizations should focus on efficiency and create processes and documents that are applicable in your organization. For an effective Environmental Management System, the documentation should be structured as following:

**a. EMS policy:** a policy represents a declarative statement by the organizations, usually, something like a constitution of the system, as well all the other documents arising from it. Most of the times, the policy is written by the top management and its purpose is to define the direction and aim of the EMS. Furthermore, the EMS Policy provides a framework for establishing EMS Objectives.

**b. EMS Manual:** according to ISO 14001:2015, an EMS Manual is not a mandatory document. The EMS Manual usually is used to document the scope of the EMS, and also the main elements of the EMS and their interactions. During the process of certification of the organization, the EMS Manual is usually the first document to be required by the certification body in order to get familiar with the system.

**c. Procedures:** The EMS procedures can have different formats and structures. They can be more structured, more illustrative, narrative (described through the text) as well as combined. In most of the cases, the procedures should include a title, purpose, scope, responsibilities and authorities, description of activities, etc.

**d. Work instructions, guidelines, and SOPs:** the purpose of work instructions is to avoid non-conformities by explaining exactly how a certain activity should be carried out. Work instructions are written for the activities within the process that have the highest probability of occurrence of non-conformities. They can also be part of the

procedures, or be referenced in a procedure, At the same time, work instructions can be structured just like procedures and cover the same elements like procedures.

**e. Records and forms:** in order to ensure that the processes are conducted in the way prescribed in the procedures and work instructions, there must be some evidence. Records and forms are the main purpose of these activities. The requirements of ISO 14001 state that the organizations need to maintain records conform to the requirements of the environmental management system. Usually, records are filled by employees, but at the same time, some of them are filled also by top management. Records and forms must be filled in the most possible understandable way. In order to ensure that the environmental management system is in the right track, the records and forms must be safeguarded. This process includes:

1. Identification of records and forms
2. Storage of records and forms
3. Protection of records and forms
4. Retrieval of records and forms
5. Retention of records and forms
6. Disposal of records and forms
7. Legibility of records and forms
8. Identifiability of records and forms
9. Traceability of records and forms

Ensuring good documentation is essential for an effective EMS. The EMS documentation needs to be based on organizational needs. Furthermore, better documentation structure will make operations much easier, while incorrect documentation structure will bring nothing except many problems.

PECB provides several environmental management system trainings including:

- ▶ ISO 14001 Introduction (1 Day)
- ▶ ISO 14001 Foundation (2 Days)
- ▶ ISO 14001 Lead Implementer (5 Days)
- ▶ ISO 14001 Lead Auditor (5 Days)
- ▶ ISO 14001:2015 Transition

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

**Nysret Lezi** is the Documentation Manager at PECB. He is responsible for developing and maintaining organizational documentations throughout the entire document life cycle. If you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact him at: [documentation@pecb.com](mailto:documentation@pecb.com)