

LRQA first to transition to ISO/IEC 17021 accreditation

Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance (LRQA) has been accredited as the first certification body to make the transition under United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) to ISO/IEC 17021 accreditation on a global level. ISO/IEC 17021 is the International Standards Organisation (ISO) standard which gives the requirements for certification bodies delivering all types of management system certification. LRQA is the only certification body to be awarded ISO/IEC 17021 accreditation by UKAS for all three management system products: QMS (ISO 9001), EMS (ISO 14001) and OHSAS (OHSAS 18001) for all industry sector scopes. The new standard requires changes to the ways in which assessments are to be performed by certification bodies.

Accreditation places rigorous requirements for competence and impartiality on the bodies that offer audit and certification to management system standards like ISO 9001:2000 (quality management), OHSAS 18001:2007 (health & safety) and ISO 14001:2004 (environmental management). ISO/IEC 17021 replaces and improves on two separate documents, ISO/IEC Guide 62:1996 and ISO/IEC Guide 66:1996.

There are two major changes which will impact organisations with certified quality and environmental management systems.

1) ISO/IEC 17021 strengthens the requirement on certification bodies for a three year certification cycle with a recertification audit, including a new requirement that the recertification audit and the decision on issuing the new certificate must be performed prior to the expiry of the existing certificate.

2) ISO/IEC 17021 also introduces a new requirement with regards to the way in which "Minor Nonconformities" (minor deficiencies present in a management system that is being audited) are addressed during the certification process. Under the new requirement, certification bodies are not allowed to issue a certificate to an organisation where Nonconformities (regardless Major or Minor) have been raised until it has reviewed and accepted the organisation's plan to correct the issue in question.

Major Nonconformity

An on-site follow up visit shall be arranged to verify the effectiveness of the corrective action. The follow up visit should be conducted about one month prior to the expiration of the certificate. The follow up visit is chargeable to the company.

Minor Nonconformity

Three possible actions to be considered:

1. the company shall provide the team leader with the proposed corrective action plans during or by the end of the visit
2. The company shall provide the team leader with the proposed corrective action plans within 3 working days from the last day of the visit.
3. If action 1 or 2 is not possible, the company must provide the proposed corrective action plans to LRQA one month prior to the expiry of their certificate. The plan will be subject to either a remote or on-site review, as a follow-up visit which is chargeable to the company. Should this be the case, our assessor would explain the next actions required.

The International Accreditation Forum (IAF), in consultation with ISO, has set the date for implementation of ISO/IEC 17021 as 15 September 2008. However, LRQA is starting to implement the above two changes, which will affect clients from 1 July 2008.

For further information on the new ISO/IEC 17021 standard, please contact our Hong Kong office.

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