

The **Greening** of Industry – Confusion or Opportunity?

*By Charles Parrish
IES Environmental Specialist*

What is this ISO 14001 stuff? What about being **Green**? Well – the answers are a mixed bag of ideas and terminology, often not necessarily related to one another.

ISO 14001 is the Management System model for building an Environmental Management System. It's a Plan-Do-Check-Act approach of "continual improvement" "in regards to environmental performance. Three areas are managed with a 14001 system:

- **Significant Environmental Aspects:** These are the most important environmental issues at your facility based on a number of customized decision criteria that a facility evaluates.
- **Legal and Other Environmental Requirements:** These are environmental laws and regulations covering air emissions, wastewater discharges, hazardous waste, and others.
- **Potential Emergency Situations:** These are anything that could possibly cause environmental damage, such as chemical spills, oil leaks, emergency wastewater discharges, etc.

An ISO 14001 system manages the above three items in connection with the facilities activities and services (on-site operations). ISO 14001 also requires companies to manage the environmental impacts of their products as well – but truth be told – most facilities do not include materials and products in the scope of their 14001 EMS.

This is where the **Green** comes in. When a company states they are **Green** it typically means they meet a standard covering their materials and products. However, this too has a large amount of wiggle room depending on which **Green** standard is used.

For example, carpet manufacturers may choose to meet the "[Green Label Plus](#)" textile standard to indicate they are **Green**. Put out by the Carpet and Rug Institute, this standard requires that finish carpets do not emit more than specified amounts of 13 chemicals in an effort to maintain optimum indoor air quality. It is a good standard, but doesn't include recycling, which is a critical component in certifying a product as **Green**.

On the other hand, the McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry (MBDC) **Green** standard awards certifications by demonstrating adequate performance in a full array of sustainability areas including:

- **Material Health** - Full identification of materials, prohibited toxics, emissions, etc.



- Material Reutilization – Recyclability, recovery plans, etc.
- Energy – Use of renewable energy for manufacture, etc.
- Water – Use of water stewardship guidelines, water audits, etc.
- Social Responsibility – Corporate ethics, fair labor practices, etc.

Organizations can be certified to the MBDC at either the Basic, Silver, Gold or Platinum levels.

The choice of which “**Green**” standard to pursue is critical and will define if your company is truly Green – or is just “**Green**washing” the target audience. In addition, ISO 14001 certification is often a requirement for meeting the higher level performance areas in many of the **Green** standards. We can assist companies in both the process of developing **Green** programs and products, as well as achieving ISO 14001 certification. [Check it out](#) and go **Green**.

Charles Parrish is an ISO 14001 and ISO 9001 Lead Auditor and a Plexus Trainer/Coach, and has assisted more than 40 companies in developing their Environmental Management System (EMS) to qualify for ISO 14001 certification. He has also taught Environmental Compliance Auditing, Introduction to Environmental Regulations, NC Environmental Permits, Introduction to Air Quality, P.E. Exam Review for Air Quality, Stack Testing 101, and other environmental courses. He can be reached at Charles_parrish@ncsu.edu or call 919-515-4266.