

Industry Expansion Solutions



Coats America: Spinning and Weaving Excellence with ISO 9001:2015 Certification in Six Months

Adherence to stringent standards in defense manufacturing is not just a preference; it's a prerequisite. International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001: 2015 certification provides manufacturers with a pivotal tool to navigate the requirements of the defense industry.

[Coats American, Inc.](#) in Kings Mountain, North Carolina is where innovation intertwines with textile traditions, manufacturing high-performance specialty yarns for various industries, from automotive to first responders and the military.

On November 17, 2023, Coats held a celebration to commemorate ISO 9001:2015 certification. Coats America is the largest producer of cut, thermal, and flame-resistant yarns for military clothing that protects from explosive injury. The organization also produces yarn for firefighter jackets and pants; their yarn even goes in uniforms for those responsible for fueling the hundreds of commercial airplanes taking off daily. ISO 9001:2015 certification becomes a powerful asset regarding lives on the line, signaling that a manufacturer adheres to globally recognized quality benchmarks.

Samahra Feemster, training manager, was the leader in implementing the ISO 9001:2015 certification program at Coats America.

Feemster collaborated with [Cleveland Community College](#) to secure a grant for the training. The Coats team selected [NC State University Industry Expansion Solutions, Nora Milley, Improvement Specialist](#) and [Jennifer Fielder, Regional Manager](#), to execute a nine-month training plan to obtain the ISO certification - but it only took Coats six months due to the team's high level of commitment.

Once the ISO certification training started, Coats employees hit the ground running.

The internal auditor team, Rommanee Swadivong, a quality control lab technician and Angela Robinson, an administrative assistant and ISO auditor, handled their job diligently. This was a team effort; each person spoke with the people in their department and reported to the team. "We wanted to ensure every 'i' was dotted and every 't' was crossed. We learned much about the organization by working hands-on with various departments," Swadivong shared.

Milley led the internal auditor team through the process in a hybrid format, including in-person sessions and virtual Zoom meetings. "Nora was very helpful. She challenged us. She wasn't going to give us the answer, she told us to 'look for it; it's there.' This approach was integral in our ability to understand the process from start to finish," stated Robinson.

Robinson highlights the transformative impact the implementation had on the organization. Robinson shared, "We make better products more efficiently. Our coefficient variables have greatly improved and have eliminated unnecessary waste. We set parameters and if we went outside of them, we knew we must take corrective action immediately."

"I've been in this business for over 40 years, and it's changed a lot," Don Hager, Coats' vice president of North American manufacturing, said proudly. Hager has been involved in manufacturing since he graduated from high school. Having been in the industry for so long, Hager has experience with the predecessor to the current ISO 9001: 2015 certification. "The old ISO was too cumbersome; you had to record every step in every procedure. The updated ISO 9001:2015 is more "user-friendly." It's a tool to help you, not just a system you must use to check a box," Hager stated.

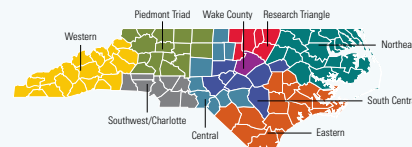
Hager credits the quick success of the ISO 9001:2015 implementation to the ambitious nature of the leaders heading the training. "To succeed with their ISO 9001:2015 certification you gotta have some "go-to" people on your side like Samahra and Nora. People like this keep everyone marching in the same direction. Nora went above and beyond what was required of her." Hager continued. "Also it takes a commitment from everyone in the organization - from the top down."

Feemster shared, "Many Coats America employees were already familiar with ISO 9001:2015, making learning the updated certification much easier. Many of our people have been here for 15-plus years so they know the business. We had to get them to understand how our quality is affected by what they do. What helped them most was that we explained it in a way they could understand."

Once the standards were in place, Feemster noted a rise in quality and increased employee satisfaction. "Once we started putting the procedures in place everybody was happy. Everyone likes order."

Hager advises any organization seeking an ISO 9001:2015 certification not to resist the transition and change. "You have to look at ISO as a company's way of life - how you communicate, how you manage, how you maneuver and how you operate."

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