

ISO 45001 and its power for good



As the ISO 45001 ship is finally launched and sets sail after an intensive four year build process, the OSH profession has many exciting opportunities ahead.



Some practitioners have asked whether ISO 45001 is a game-changer. I think it may be because international standards matter. They help organisations to deal with multiple regulatory systems, approaches and cultures across economic boundaries and national borders. Some 2.78 million people die globally due to their work each year and management standards can encourage much-needed solutions.

Some people anticipate that ISO 45001 will outstrip the OHSAS 18001 standard, which has an estimated 150,000 certifications, and possibly ISO 14001 (environmental management) at around 350,000.

OSH professionals will have a pivotal role in advising and supporting the journey of improvement, raising awareness and forging alliances across organisations. Due to the new standard's focus on leadership and context, leaders adopting its principles will have to live and breathe it, keeping it front of mind and integral to their strategies, operations and stakeholder relations. They will have to create cultures in which OSH competence is developed across the board and where workers can participate in decision-making.

The standard will require proportionate OSH management systems that help to prevent injury and ill health, not only within organisations but throughout their supply chains. This is important in our globalised world where it has been estimated that only around 10 per cent of the working populations of low-income countries are effectively covered by safety and health regulation.

IOSH's involvement in ISO 45001's development has allowed us to influence debate and build relationships, gaining international support for our special liaison status on the development committee (ISO PC 283). We engaged members in influencing the drafts, stepped in at short notice to successfully host an ISO meeting with the help of our Caribbean branch, and garnered the ISO PC 283 senior team to support our ISO masterclass roadshow in four UK cities. Some members have asked why the standard has taken more than four years to develop. I think its aim of global engagement was a key contributing factor, to which the thousands of comments received were testimony. And, as the standard gained momentum, more countries and liaison bodies came on board, which was welcome and generated further debate and fresh input.

Some people also have reservations about the standard, questioning whether it's just about getting a certificate. I'd say definitely not; certification must reflect a commitment to significant culture change, effective OSH risk management and ongoing improvement. Organisations of any size can use the standard without going for certification. Whatever their chosen route, it's positive action that is important.

Just as the improvement voyage for organisations adopting ISO 45001 is a continual one, so too is the evolution of the OSH profession as we keep pace with changing practice and technological developments such as artificial intelligence. This new standard gives us a fantastic opening to transform safety and health and ensure it receives the resources it deserves. IOSH members worldwide have a vital part to play in helping organisations raise their performance, saving lives, supporting livelihoods and securing brighter futures.

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