



FT-14 aims to help firms meet ISO14001 standard in six months

Construction industry fast tracks supplier EMS

Wates, Willmott Dixon and Laing O'Rourke are trying to green their supply chains by asking major suppliers to attend a fast-track programme designed to help them meet ISO14001 standards within six months.

A firm can take more than two years to achieve the environmental management standard ISO14001, but under a new fast-track approach companies are being pushed to reach similar standards in a quarter of that time.

The approach, known as FT-14, tries to introduce environmental management rapidly along supply chains rather than company by company. It was developed by commercial business support firm ISYS International.

Construction giants Wates, Willmott Dixon and Laing O'Rourke are among the first to test the method. More supply chain leaders in the sector are expected to join soon.

The approach takes small groups of suppliers and gives them access to an online toolkit which breaks down implementation into "bite-sized chunks", ISYS explains. FT-14 also helps firms build an environmental management system (EMS). This is supplemented by monthly group workshops where progress is reported, problems are discussed and ideas shared.

According to Gary Holland, technical director at ISYS, FT-14 succeeds because it supports firms throughout the process:

"There is no implementation plan in ISO14001: It does not concern itself with how you arrive at the standard, only with the requirements you must achieve," he said. "Unfortunately for many firms this means motivation tails off quickly."

FT-14 was initially customised for the construction industry and is being promoted by the South East Centre for the Built Environment (SECBE), Constructing Excellence in the Built Environment, the West Midlands Centre for Constructing Excellence and Manchester's Centre for Construction Innovation.

The timing is significant. As the sector sets itself more ambitious green targets and the emphasis on sustainable building gathers momentum, firms are increasingly dependent on contractors and subcontractors to achieve these goals.

"Wates, Willmott Dixon and Laing O'Rourke want to achieve zero waste in a relatively short time. They know they can't do it in isolation," said Derek Rees, director of SECBE.

Mark Tant, Willmott Dixon Constructing's managing director agreed: "We have goals to produce zero net waste and to reduce the impacts of our builds and their embedded energy. We need to provide the framework to get there, but we also need buy-in from our supply chain."

Laing O'Rourke's south-east construction arm is rolling out FT-14 to about 100 of its core contractors. Those considered having the most significant potential environmental impacts, such as demolition firms, have been invited to participate first.

"We recognised that by creating a green supply chain it needed to be accredited and this allows us to do that in an economic way," said Mark Holdsworth, Laing O'Rourke's health, safety and environment manager. "We can facilitate the sessions, be part of it and monitor their progress."

But while the firms seem enthusiastic about the scheme, there has been little evaluation of its long-term impact and success.

"It's not impossible to get ISO14001 done quickly, but whether that's the most appropriate end point is uncertain," said Martin Baxter, technical director at the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. "The criteria of any scheme must minimise environmental impacts and maximise the environmental benefits. It shouldn't be done just to satisfy big clients."

There is also a risk that rolling out the programme in six months hinders a firm's ability to embed EMS principles throughout the company. Martin Baxter agreed: "Businesses might not get the full value from having the time to sit back and think how we can make this relevant to our business." ■