

Safety management – certification of OHSMS >

This information bulletin is to assist in understanding and making informed decisions about the process of certification of Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems (OHSMS).

How does the certification process work?

To understand the way in which an OHSMS is certified the role of the [Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand](#) (JAS-ANZ) needs to be described.

JAS-ANZ is an international organisation established in 1991 by a formal agreement between the Governments of Australia and New Zealand. JAS-ANZ operates on a self funding non-profit basis and is controlled by a Government Board appointed by the relevant Governments.

The principal role of JAS-ANZ is to be the joint accreditation body for organisations that certify management systems, products and personnel comply with prescribed standards.

Organisations have to satisfy JAS-ANZ that they are impartial and technically competent before they are accredited. An accredited certification body for example, cannot be a consultant as well as an auditor body.

A Management Systems Certification Body, once accredited by JAS-ANZ, proceeds to certify management systems as complying with the relevant standard.

This is achieved by auditing compliance of the management system at regular intervals.

What is a certification standard?

A certification standard is the standard recognised and adopted by the accreditation agency (JAS-ANZ). This is normally a standard produced by [Standards Australia](#), Standards NZ or other body such as the [International Standards Organization](#) (ISO).

Current examples are [ISO 9001](#) in the quality field and ISO 14001 in the environmental management field.

Standards bodies like Standards Australia describe these standards as specifications. This means they set out principles against which an audit can be conducted to verify conformance with the specification.

Guidance standards on the other hand are not part of the certification process. Standards such as [AS/NZS 4804 Occupational health and safety management systems - General guidelines on principles, systems and supporting techniques](#) were developed by Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand in view of the apparent demand for a standard in this area.

A guidance standard such as AS/NZS 4804 cannot be used by JAS-ANZ for certification purposes.

[AS/NZS 4801](#) (draft) by contrast is a specification standard against which the accreditation and certification process could be based.

Currently SafetyMAP (Workcover Victoria) is the only standard recognised by JAS-ANZ for certification purposes. *Note: This is an audit system not an OHSMS.*

It can also be used for “self declaration” where an organisation can arrange for auditing of their system outside of the whole JAS-ANZ certification infrastructure.

AS/NZS 4801 follows the framework set out in AS/NZS 4804, both being based on the environmental management systems standards produced by ISO (14000 series).

A specification sets out the required elements of a management system. Audit criteria then needs to be developed for certification audits to be conducted.

How are the qualifications of auditors established?

The accredited body you choose to audit your system has to employ competent auditors.

In Australia JAS-ANZ also accredits bodies to certify personnel like auditors, and the only organisation with current accreditation is the Quality Society of Australasia (QSA).

QSA currently certifies Quality and Environmental Auditors, and has applications with JAS-ANZ to also cover OHS and Food Safety.

To be accredited to certify OHS auditors QSA has developed OHS Auditor Certification Criteria. These criteria were developed by an industry working group and were subject to consultation and review.

QSA administers a Register of Certified Auditors which lists people who have applied and met the criteria. QSA has not been accredited to certify OHS system auditors but has an application pending with JAS-ANZ.

JAS-ANZ also recognises auditors registered with the International Register of Certificated Auditors (UK) and the Registrar Accreditation Board (US).

If my OHSMS is certified does this mean I have met my legal obligations?

Any OHSMS should help you meet your legal obligations but it is not a substitute for the law or the outcomes required by the law.

The duty of care in OHS legislation is outcome based and the OHSMS is essentially a way of managing OHS, or a process that should be followed.

The status of an OHSMS, either a local company system, or a system certified by an accredited body, is the same under the OHS law. Both represent ways in which employers are planning to meet their duties but they are not substitutes for the law.

Only standards that are referenced in legislation are part of the OHS compliance regime. However OHSMS are part of the state of knowledge about how to manage OHS and may be considered by a court in the same way that other industry guidance and information is considered.

Consequently, if a company was certified against some future standard like AS/NZS 4801 it would not constitute automatic compliance with general duties. The company might legitimately seek to use it as evidence of its approach in applications for exemptions, approvals etc, and of course would use it to demonstrate its efforts to meet its duties if subject to enforcement or prosecution action.

Five reasons why OHSMS succeed

- 1) The OHSMS is directly aimed at managing critical risks and any other reasons for its existence are secondary.
- 2) Senior managers or owner/operators practise what they preach and make decisions to eliminate or reduce hazards.
- 3) Supervisors and employees understand their role in the system and are closely involved in its development and operation.
- 4) The system is commensurate with the risks to be managed and is absolutely tailored to the organisation's requirements.
- 5) The OHSMS is able to withstand, and welcomes, robust questioning and review from everyone involved.

Five reasons why OHSMS fail

- 1) Management support is irregular and inconsistent.
- 2) Everyone treats the system as "paper warfare" and follow procedures to keep the bosses happy regardless of their effectiveness.
- 3) The OHSMS is established in response to external demands and never really "owned" or understood by those subject to it.
- 4) The system is imposed without effective participation by those who have to make it work.
- 5) The effort to build an organisation specific system is not made and "off the shelf" solutions are applied that have little relevance to the culture of the workplace.

NT WorkSafe >

GPO Box 4821

Darwin NT 0801

Telephone: 1800 019 115
Facsimile: (08) 8999 5141
Email: ntworksafe.deet@nt.gov.au
Website: worksafe.nt.gov.au