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## Should certifiers get certified?

*A new ISO standard calls for certification bodies to implement a quality system that conforms with the ISO 9001:2000. The question arises, who is best placed to judge the fulfilment of this requirement, an accreditor or a certification body?*

The ISO Guides 62 (for certification of quality systems) and 66 (for certification of environmental management systems) will soon be replaced with the ISO 17021: *Conformity assessment – general requirements for bodies providing assessment and certification of management systems*. The standard is in the final stages of approval and is currently out for consultation. The major new issues are:

- The requirement to fulfil the ISO 9001:2000.
- A clearer process approach consistent with current trends in quality assurance.
- Extensive development on how to ensure impartiality.
- Clearer requirements for the three types of audits: initial, surveillance and re-certification audits.
- Using principle-based performance requirements rather than prescriptive requirements whenever possible.

In order to ensure impartiality a certification body (CB) has to conduct an 'impartiality threat analysis'. This analysis and the management

strategy to deal with the threats shall be reviewed by a special committee. To assist CBs the ISO 17021 has an annex that explains what is involved in conducting an impartiality analysis. Impartiality has been a major problem area for certification and accreditation bodies over the years. The International Accreditation Forum has developed over this extended period 25 clauses in their Guidance Notes to the ISO 65 to regulate this. It is expected that the improved standards will largely make all this extra guidance unnecessary.

It should be noted that the ISO 17021 is not intended for product certification, ISO 65 is still the guiding norm for this. However, it is reasonable to expect that in the future a revision of ISO 65 may take a similar path. Therefore organic certification bodies should make themselves familiar with this new standard.

The comment period for the Draft International Standard closed on 16 January 2004, and the final draft for approval by the ISO Commission is expected this year. ■

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