

NM MEP offers crash course in ISO certification

By Denise Williams, Innovation Director, Northwest Region, New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership

New Mexico companies seeking higher-margin work often seek ISO certification, and the New Mexico Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NM MEP) can help them prepare to get it.

Certification with the most recent iteration of the best-known ISO quality management standard, ISO 9001:2015, is increasingly required by top-tier companies and government agencies that hire private contractors for supplies or services. Certification, or registration, tells a customer that a company's products and services will consistently satisfy its requirements even as the company continually improves.



“There may be customers that a business wants to pursue, but some require ISO 9001 registration, so the business doesn't qualify to be a vendor until it achieves registration,” said Jeff Abrams, Southeast Region innovation director for NM MEP. “If you are looking at very drastic growth upcoming, ISO can help put systems in place before that growth to make it easier.”

NM MEP, a nonprofit organization that helps businesses increase profitability and competitiveness, has organized a three-day course in February to help businesses prep for ISO certification. NM MEP works closely with the New Mexico Economic Development Department to provide this and other programs throughout the year.

The ISO course will explain what organization, leadership, planning, support and operations the new standard expects of businesses. It will also address the performance evaluation a company has to undergo to be registered. NM MEP then works with participating businesses to help them apply the information to their unique processes.

“We basically teach them what the standard means and then (provide) each company onsite assistance for three days,” Abrams said. “That time could be used for a gap analysis — basically evaluating the company's current practices, comparing that to the ISO 9001:2015 standard and identifying any nonconformance to the standard.”

NM MEP recently checked back in with PESCO to evaluate the Farmington manufacturer's progress in preparing to obtain the latest ISO certification. PESCO sent two team members to attend NM MEP's ISO training in 2016. "It's been great to have an extra set of eyes to make sure (we're) still on the right path," said Craig Mayberry, PESCO Manager of Manufacturing Excellence.

The current ISO standards were updated in 2015 (they're reviewed every five years to keep them relevant and up to date), and companies have three years — in this case, until September 2018 — to sync their quality-management systems to the standard.

If a company secured certification with ISO 9001:2008 and wants to recertify with the newer standard, "their workload is a little bit less," Abrams said, "but we cover everything, because I've observed that even businesses with the 2008 standard have room for improvement."

ISO has made it easier for smaller companies, service companies and even nonmanufacturing businesses to register. It eliminated the requirement for dozens of written procedures that didn't apply to many businesses.

The course format is interactive, Abrams said. "What we get out of that ... is a really synergistic relationship where participants basically feed off each other. And then they also establish relationships where they actually call each other and say, 'What do you think about this?'"

The upcoming ISO course is scheduled for Feb. 27 and 28 and March 1 in Room 99228 at the San Juan College of Energy in Farmington. While organizers hope to offer additional sessions in other New Mexico regions, the Feb. course is open to all New Mexico businesses. Companies must send at least two employees to the course, and pre-registration is required. Tuition assistance is available to qualified companies through the state's Job Training Incentive Program.

For more details about the workshop and tuition assistance, contact Denise Williams at 505-860-9961. For information about other NM MEP services and programs, visit <http://newmexicomep.org/>.

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