

The Four-Field Corrective Action Record

Source: Francesco Dore, *The Helm and the Lens*, Volume 1b — ISO 14001:2026, subchapter 3.12

FOUR FIELDS

Action, rung on the robustness ladder, the test that will establish effectiveness, and the date of that test rather than of the action.

The book treats a corrective action as a hypothesis: it asserts that if this changes, that will not happen again, and like any hypothesis it can be wrong. The action is implemented on a date. Whether it worked is established later, by a test decided in advance, against evidence that would look different if it had not. This record keeps those two dates apart, and it asks for the test at the moment the action is agreed — the single change the book identifies as turning effectiveness review from an aspiration into something that actually happens.

The robustness ladder

As set out in subchapter 3.12. The example column is the book's case at the Salamanca Wharf, Hobart.

Rung	Action type	Depends on	Example in the book
1 — weakest	Tell people; retrain; put up a sign	Someone remembering at the moment it matters	Instruct the kitchen team (done twice)
2	Write or amend a procedure	Someone reading it, and being able to comply	Update the waste oil procedure
3	Assign a named owner and a scheduled check	The owner remaining in post and the check being done	Night porter to inspect the yard at handover
4	Change the arrangement so the right way is the easy way	The arrangement staying in place	Key cabinet accessible after 17:00; store openable by the duty manager
5 — strongest	Change the physical situation so the failure cannot occur or cannot go unnoticed	Nothing recurring	Bunded holding point uphill of nothing, drums cannot reach the grate

Three things the book says about the ladder

- **Higher is not automatically better.** A rung-five action that costs more than the significance of the effects warrants is disproportionate, and the standard's own proportionality language says so.
- **Rungs combine well.** Fixing the access, adding a contained holding point and instructing the team together is durable; instructing the team alone is the part undone by the first staff change.
- **The rung predicts who must be involved.** Rungs one and two can be done by the department alone; rungs four and five almost always need someone outside it. A property whose actions never rise above rung two may have no practical route for one department to ask another for anything.

The deadline trap

A closure deadline printed on a form quietly selects the action that fits inside it, which is almost always rung one or two. In the book's case the property did not remove its deadline; it separated two dates that had been one. The action had to be decided within thirty days, and the decision recorded its own implementation date, which could be longer where the chosen rung required it. The thirty days are that property's own choice, not a requirement of ISO 14001.

What the standard asks, as the book reads it

ISO 14001:2026 separates reacting to and correcting the nonconformity, evaluating the need for action to eliminate its causes, implementing any action needed, and reviewing the effectiveness of any corrective action taken. Corrective actions are to be appropriate to the significance of the effects of the nonconformities, and documented information is to be available on their nature, the actions taken and the results. The standard prescribes no form, no ladder and no closure period; the ladder is this book's method.

Corrective action records

One block per corrective action. Correction of the instance, if any, is recorded separately; this record is for the action on the cause.

Record 1 · Finding reference: _____ · Action decided on: _____	
1 · Action	
2 · Rung on the robustness ladder	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 <i>(see the ladder; rungs may be combined — tick each one used)</i>
3 · Test that will establish effectiveness	<i>Decided now, at the moment the action is agreed. What evidence would look different if the action had not worked?</i>
4 · Date of the test	<i>The date of the effectiveness test — not the date of the action.</i>

Record 2 · Finding reference: _____ · Action decided on: _____	
1 · Action	
2 · Rung on the robustness ladder	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 <i>(see the ladder; rungs may be combined — tick each one used)</i>
3 · Test that will establish effectiveness	<i>Decided now, at the moment the action is agreed. What evidence would look different if the action had not worked?</i>
4 · Date of the test	<i>The date of the effectiveness test — not the date of the action.</i>

Record 3 · Finding reference: _____ · Action decided on: _____	
1 · Action	
2 · Rung on the robustness ladder	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 <i>(see the ladder; rungs may be combined — tick each one used)</i>
3 · Test that will establish effectiveness	<i>Decided now, at the moment the action is agreed. What evidence would look different if the action had not worked?</i>
4 · Date of the test	<i>The date of the effectiveness test — not the date of the action.</i>

Record 4 · Finding reference: _____ · Action decided on: _____	
1 · Action	
2 · Rung on the robustness ladder	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 <i>(see the ladder; rungs may be combined — tick each one used)</i>
3 · Test that will establish effectiveness	<i>Decided now, at the moment the action is agreed. What evidence would look different if the action had not worked?</i>
4 · Date of the test	<i>The date of the effectiveness test — not the date of the action.</i>

What this template is not: ISO 14001 does not prescribe this form. It is a working aid drawn from the book; the standard and, where certification is involved, the certification body's own rules and contract govern the real case.