

WORKING MATERIAL 4.14 · CHAPTER 4 — THE CERTIFIER'S LENS

What the Certificate Does Not Prove

Source: Francesco Dore, *The Helm and the Lens*, Volume 1b — ISO 14001:2026, subchapter 4.14

GUIDING QUESTION

A client asks you to confirm, in writing, that you comply with all applicable environmental law. Can you answer that with your certificate?

1 · Verification Pact

Copied from the book. The third column is for your property: what holds here, and how you know.

What is claimed	What actually holds	In our property
"Our certificate shows we are an environmentally responsible hotel."	It attests that a management system meets the requirements and is effective within a stated scope. The standard states no environmental performance criteria and says its adoption does not in itself guarantee optimal environmental outcomes.	
"ISO 14001 certification confirms our legal compliance."	It attests processes to determine obligations and evaluate compliance. The guidance states that a non-compliance identified and corrected by the system is not necessarily a nonconformity — the certificate evidences a capability to find and fix, not a state of being compliant.	
"A certified hotel performs better than an uncertified one."	Nothing in the standard supports that comparison. Certification governs how an organisation manages its aspects; an uncertified property may perform better on any given measure.	
"The auditors checked everything."	Auditing is a sampling activity. Absence of findings is a statement about the sample examined, at those hours, in those areas.	
"The certificate proves we are compliant today."	It describes a system as examined at dates within a cycle and maintained by sampled surveillance. Status can change, and suspensions and withdrawals are publicly recorded.	
"Our certificate covers the property."	It covers the scope printed on it, and only that. Leased venues, concessions and off-site operations are inside it only if they were put there.	
"Saying a little more than the certificate supports is just marketing."	External communication relevant to the system must be consistent with information generated within it and reliable, and the guidance requires it to be truthful, not misleading, factual, accurate and not to exclude relevant information.	

2 · Common mistakes — a self-check

Tick each mistake you recognise in your own property. The consequence is the book's.

- ☐ **Answering a compliance question with a certificate** — It attests a capability to find and correct, not a state of compliance.
- ☐ **Reporting an intensity figure where an absolute was asked for** — The result is called an improvement that the absolute figure may not support.
- ☐ **Using the certificate to claim superiority over uncertified competitors** — The claim stands on ground where the standard offers no support at all.
- ☐ **Sending the scan without the scope and without the register reference** — The buyer is left to draw their own boundary.
- ☐ **Letting the commercial team write environmental answers without knowing what the certificate asserts** — They are not guessing out of carelessness; nobody has told them.
- ☐ **Overcorrecting into silence** — A bare statement that you are certified, with no data and no explanation, loses to a better-presented claim that is no truer.
- ☐ **Forgetting that the standard governs what you say about the system** — Overstating the certificate breaches the communication requirement of the very document being cited.

3 · What an auditor would ask to see

Questions drawn from the subchapter's reading of the standard and its practical application. They are questions to test your own evidence, not additional requirements.

Question	Where the evidence lives	Seen?
When a client asks about legal compliance, is the answer drawn from the compliance evaluation — frequency, last evaluation, status, what was found and closed?	Compliance evaluation records	
Are absolute as well as intensity figures for energy, water and waste held for at least two years?	Monitoring data	
Is the certificate sent with its scope and the register reference?	Tender library; questionnaires	
Is external communication about the certificate consistent with the system, truthful, and complete in the information it gives?	Website; tender responses	
Have the people who write tenders and website copy been briefed on what the certificate asserts and what it does not?	Briefing record	

4 · From the Operative Synthesis to action

Concrete actions taken from the subchapter's Operative Synthesis. Fill in the owner and the date in your property.

Action	Owner	Due date
1. State the certificate exactly and verifiably, and claim nothing it does not prove.		
2. Hold the property's own performance and compliance data long enough to show a direction.		

Action	Owner	Due date
3. Keep the two apart in every answer, and say which one answers which question.		

What this sheet is not: ISO 14001 does not prescribe this form. It is a working aid drawn from the book; the standard and, in Chapter 4, the certification body's own rules and contract govern the real case.