

Corrective Action (8.5.2) and Preventive Action (8.5.3)

A good deal of confusion surrounds these two clauses and their meaning to an organisation. The main concern appears to be the distinction between the two.

Corrective action is concerned with putting something right which has gone wrong, in a manner which not just corrects the problem, but also prevents its recurrence. To simply put it right is **correction**, not corrective.

Corrective Action

A simple example might be the fact that you have daisies growing in your lawn and you don't want them. By mowing the lawn you remove the flowers, this is correction, but they always come back (usually more of them it seems). To perform corrective action, you must get the roots out. In other words, prevent them growing again.

For example, in most businesses, corrective action should occur following:

- Internal/external audit findings
- Management reviews
- Customer complaints
- Supplier problems
- Product nonconformity
- Follow up from customer feedback
- Follow up from process measurements

Corrective actions can be determined by anyone in the organisation and all should be encouraged to participate and should include 'root cause analysis' to determine the actual cause of the problem wherever possible.

It is quite easy to go 'over the top' with these actions and spend a lot of time, effort and money in taking corrective action. This is why clause 8.5.2 states that the actions taken should be appropriate to the effects of the problems found or risks encountered.

Preventive Action

Preventive action can be a little more difficult to grasp in that it requires us to consider what problems might exist and to take action which will prevent the problem from occurring at all rather than to wait until the problem occurs and then deal with it. Clearly, this will depend very much on the type of organisation involved e.g. everyone who flies in an aircraft will hope that the plane manufacturers consider preventive action rather than corrective action.

Using the daisy analogy above, it might be OK to allow daisies to grow on a lawn before taking action but if Wimbledon tennis club allowed them to grow on centre court and then dug them up, I suspect the players might have something to say.

Preventive action could be said to be a 'state of mind' or cultural issue and should be incorporated into the planning activities of the organisation. It should take into account previous projects and other available data which can be used to avoid potential problems for future situations. It is also useful to consider preventive actions following corrective action as you may identify other products or services similar to the one where you have identified a problem and be able to take action which prevents potential nonconformity.

Areas for consideration include:

- Risk analysis
- Failure Mode and Effects Analysis (FMEA's)
- Reviewing customer expectations
- Management review
- Results from customer satisfaction measurement
- Market needs analysis
- Follow up from nonconformities to determine if the same problem could occur elsewhere
- Opportunities for improvements identified during audits

It could be argued that the whole of ISO 9001 is about preventive action as it aims to prevent problems occurring and to satisfy customers. However, you will be required to demonstrate that you are actively trying to identify potential problems and taking suitable actions.

Clearly, preventive action can be an excellent tool for preventing non-conformance and waste, along with the associated costs of doing things wrong. Again though, it is important to consider the risk or impact of potential problems before taking action as there is the potential to consume considerable resources in preventing a situation which may have negligible impact on you or your customers.

Effective corrective and preventive actions will obviously lead to potential improvements for the organisation, which is why they are under the same clause as Continual Improvement. However, they are usually most effective when they are integrated into the normal business activities of the organisation rather than being left to the management representative or quality manager to deal with.