

Launching a major revision of BS 8848

The Royal Geographical Society was the prestigious venue for the launch of a major revision of BS 8848. This afternoon event celebrated the growing awareness of the standard, reviewed how it's changed, and discussed the impact of the standard on the overseas venture industry.

Welcome

BSI's **Dan Palmer** welcomed the nearly 130 attendees. He explained that in common with all standards, BS 8848 had gone through a rigorous review process to assess if it needed to be updated or improved. The verdict was that a major revision was appropriate to make sure the standard retained its relevance and usefulness. "Today," Palmer promised, "we'll cover what the standard is, how it works, and look at what's new."

'A really excellent document'

BBC reporter and producer, **Alistair Macdonald**, made the keynote address. A veteran of innumerable mountaineering expeditions, he described BS 8848 as 'a really excellent document'. He singled out the requirement for informed consent. Parents, he said, were very often unclear about what expeditions involved. He also noted that the legal and moral responsibility rests with expedition organizers. "We can't put the problem at a third-world supplier's door," he said. Macdonald emphasized that every trip is different, and that "the devil is in the detail." Risk assessments must make concessions to the reality of local conditions where transport, accommodation, wildlife, food, water, and medical provision can be vastly different from those at home. He ended by noting that there have been 'some dreadful tragedies' over the past few years. "In my view, some are preventable," he added. "BS 8848 supplies a framework. We must look at the details."

What has changed for 2014?

Shane Winser from the Royal Geographical Society spoke next. She sits on the technical committee responsible for revising BS 8848. In updating the standard, she explained, the committee had looked at incidents from the last decade. "We know things go wrong. We need to learn and plan from that," she said. Work had also been done to make the standard easier to use: it has gone from 65 pages to 39; clauses have been regrouped and consolidated; and it focuses on key processes in a logical order of planning, implementation and review. Winser summarized the changes to the 2014 version as follows:

- a greater emphasis on approval and review of safety management systems, and more onus on the importance of subject matter experts and the detailed involvement of senior management
- more information for participants, who need to understand what they are doing to enable informed consent
- the methodology used to assess the competence of participants has been revised, as has the approach to remote supervision
- the competence criteria for leaders have been updated
- the standard has been simplified, and misunderstood terms like 'downtime' have been clarified
- the concept of 'partial conformity' has been removed because it was unused and hard to interpret
- the standard now supplies more clarity on conformity testing, which is to be done on a sampling basis.

How BS 8848 has helped the venture industry

Peter Harvey from the Expedition Providers Association spoke next. He chairs the BS 8848 technical committee and noted that around 360 comments were received from the public consultation. "We have spent time," he said, "on building this standard. We now need to make sure it is used."

Harvey explained that the standard is there to enable people to take risks, to help them understand their responsibilities, and who is taking care of them. "We all want to keep people safe," he said. The standard supplies a tool to do that, making sure that everything is clearly communicated, and in particular that senior managers see what is happening on the front line. The standard also helps with the selection of third-party providers and how to assess the associated risks. "We still have liability," he said, "and still need to do the best we can to assess airlines and yak handlers." The common thread, said Harvey, is communication.

He also outlined how the standard is helping the venture industry. It supplies a useful management tool that acts as a final checklist. It provides for detailed operational reviews that help managers to find staff and build the right competencies in UK and ground teams. The standard's use will suggest training, support, and supervision needs. Additionally self-declaration and other party assessment can help achieve more sales, and help recruit and retain better people. Harvey concluded by noting that BS 8848 has matured. It is flexible, adaptable and can work for all kinds of organizations in all sorts of areas. He added: "BS 8848 is now seen as what needs to be in place. We as an industry need to embrace it. It will be used both to defend us, and prosecute us in the future."

Panel discussion

The formal part of the day concluded with a panel discussion. The panel comprised **Shane Winser** and **Peter Harvey**, joined by **Angie Hills** from ABTA, **Richard Oliver** from Year-Out Group, and **Dan Palmer** from BSI.

One questioner asked about **conformity to the standard**. Peter Harvey replied that this remains voluntary, but that the Expedition Providers Association is now asking future members to consider self- or peer-assessment. ABTA, meanwhile, now encourages members to look at the standard and review themselves against its requirements. But, said Angie Hills, it's not a membership condition.

Another questioner asked how best to approach **self-assessment**. Winser advised that organizations should compile a checklist, then validate their compliance with evidence. Self-assessment should be straightforward, she said, but it is an iterative process. She added that those doing self-assessment should be proud and make a public declaration of the fact. "You will be a better organization and more in touch with clients as a result."

The penultimate questioner asked about **third-party certification** of the standard. Dan Palmer said that for BSI's part, the emergence of a certification scheme would depend on industry demand. As things stand, he said, self-assessment is still a significant claim, with legal implications. Peter Harvey and Angie Hills were concerned that it would be hard to find credible specialist assessors for third-party certification, and certification might lead to a false sense of security.

The day's last questioner asked about **awareness of BS 8848 at the ISO level**. Peter Harvey explained that translating the whole standard into an international document had been looked at and found to be 'incredibly complicated'. However the UK has partnered with Brazil to produce a safety management system standard, and one on informed consent which is newly published. Both align with BS 8848.

In closing, Alistair Macdonald warmly thanked everyone for their attendance and invited all to join in an informal networking session, over tea and cake, which would conclude the event.

Find out more about BS 8848:2014 and download the guide to the standard at www.bsigroup.com/bs8848.