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From Standard to Strategy

How the ALIGN Methodology Applies ISO 22301 for the Private Sector

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ISO 22301 is the international standard for Business Continuity Management Systems (BCMS). It defines what a compliant program must include: risk assessments, business impact analyses, documented continuity strategies, exercise programs, and continual improvement processes. For organizations pursuing certification, it provides a credible, auditable framework.

But compliance and capability are not the same thing.

Many ISO 22301-aligned programs produce documentation that satisfies an audit cycle. When a real incident arrives, those documents stay on the shelf. Decisions get made by whoever is in the room. This gap, between preparedness on paper and resilience in practice, is the problem the ALIGN approach exists to close.

ALIGN is not a replacement for ISO 22301. It is built on the same core requirements, but it goes further: covering how decisions are actually made under stress, how private sector continuity connects to government emergency planning, and how resilience is built through operational capability, not just earned as a certification.

ISO 22301: What the Standard Requires

Organized around the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, ISO 22301's operational clauses form the structure of any compliant BCMS:

- **Clause 4** — Context of the organization: understanding internal and external issues, and the needs of interested parties
- **Clause 6** — Planning: risk assessment and BCMS objectives
- **Clause 8** — Operation: business impact analysis, continuity strategy, documented plans, and exercise programs
- **Clause 9** — Performance evaluation: monitoring, internal audit, and management review
- **Clause 10** — Improvement: corrective action and continual improvement

These clauses tell you what to include. They do not tell you how to build a program that changes how people behave, connects to outside emergency resources, or creates a decision system that holds up under real pressure.

The ALIGN – ISO 22301 Crosswalk

ALIGN PHASE	ISO 22301 CLAUSE(S)	ALIGNMENT DESCRIPTION
A — Assess Diagnose	Cl. 4.1, 4.2, 6.1, 8.2	Threat landscape and risk mapping corresponds to ISO's risk assessment and BIA requirements. Structured diagnosis of internal decision authority, escalation pathways, and operational breakpoints extends the standard's context-setting requirement into behavioral architecture.
L — Link Coordinate	Cl. 4.2, 7.4, 8.4	Connecting BCMS objectives to government planning structures (ICS, NIMS, CPG 101, NRF) extends ISO's stakeholder and communication requirements into the public-private interface, a coordination layer the standard does not address.
I — Integrate Build	Cl. 8.3, 8.4	Operational redesign of decision rights, roles, and RTO/RPO-aligned playbooks directly fulfills ISO's continuity strategy and documented plans clauses while maintaining compatibility with relevant government frameworks.
G — Generate Stress Test	Cl. 8.6, 9.1	Government-informed, maturity-scored exercises apply ISO's

ALIGN PHASE	ISO 22301 CLAUSE(S)	ALIGNMENT DESCRIPTION
		<p>exercise programme requirement with defined quality standards and scenario conditions drawn from publicly available government restoration planning: power, telecom, and transportation sequencing.</p>
<p>N — Normalize Sustain</p>	<p>Cl. 9.3, 10.2</p>	<p>Prioritized improvement plans, training cadence, and maturity benchmarking map directly to ISO's management review and continual improvement clauses, while integrating the organization into ongoing government planning cycles.</p>

Where ALIGN Goes Further: Five Private-Sector Differentiators

1. Decision Architecture Before Documentation

I SO 22301 centers on documented information. ALIGN begins with how decisions are actually made before a single plan is written.

The Assess phase maps decision authority, escalation pathways, and divergence between stated systems and actual systems through structured interviews. The output is a decision architecture map, revealing where coordination will break under stress.

2. The Public-Private Interface

I SO 22301 does not address the interface between private sector continuity programs and government emergency management.

ALIGN's Link phase explicitly bridges BCMS objectives to ICS, NIMS, CPG 101, and the National Response Framework, identifying where government resources and ESF coordination can support continuity goals.

3. Stress Testing with Realistic External Assumptions

A LIGN's Generate Stress phase builds exercises using publicly available government planning information, power restoration timelines, telecommunications contingencies, and transportation recovery sequencing, testing plans against accurate external conditions rather than internal assumptions.

4. Outcome Orientation vs. Certification Orientation

I SO 22301 is optimized for auditable compliance with an internationally recognized standard. ALIGN is optimized for operational capability: whether an organization responds and recovers differently when the situation is real. Both serve legitimate purposes; they are optimized for different outcomes.

5. Sector-Dependent Infrastructure Planning

A LIGN explicitly incorporates the government restoration sequencing layer, connecting private sector RTO and RPO targets to the realistic timeline of external resource recovery, so that organizations are testing against the environment they will actually face.

Conclusion

ISO 22301 is a thorough, internationally recognized standard that defines what a business continuity management system must include. For organizations that need certification, it remains the right framework.

What follows a BCMS health check is a program built to close the gaps it found, tested to show they are closed, and maintained so they stay closed. ISO 22301 describes what that program must include. ALIGN builds it.

ABOUT SENTINEL RESILIENCE PARTNERS

Sentinel Resilience Partners is a strategic advisory firm specializing in emergency management, crisis preparedness, continuity of operations, and resilience consulting for organizations that cannot afford to fail. ALIGN engagements are structured at four tiers: Audit, Build, Validate, and Sustain.

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