



Why are safety audit programs beneficial?

Auditing provides a means of identifying potential problems before they have an impact on the health and safety of the business and its people; however, it must be the right quality of auditing to elicit the relevant information, without which the business will not be able to continually improve. High quality auditing must break through the hurdle of bad news making its way to the top of the company hierarchy¹ so that potential failures can be assessed and rectified before they turn into an incident.

Safety audits are not about identifying uncontrolled or inadequately controlled hazards; they are about identifying strengths and weaknesses in safety management systems. Audit of business activities uncovers system deficiencies and offer opportunities to take corrective action. This approach provides immediate knowledge on how well safety is being managed. This type of audit measures the level of performance of the system through the identification of elements that need attention thereby facilitating improvement; further it allows for comparisons or benchmarking over time.

Good quality, thorough audits not only get the right information out, they also provide the opportunity to identify precursors to disaster; this suggests that successful audits will uncover significant problems where they might exist.

Dr Deming² found that approximately 85% of errors take place due to the system, therefore ensuring that the system is in place, implemented and working as it should contributes to the reduction of errors, thereby reducing the potential for an incident to occur.

All audits follow certain principles³. The generally accepted audit principles state that audits should be:

Systematic-be structured and based on appropriate sampling to ensure that confidence can be placed in the results and conclusion of the audit.

Outcomes focussed-how well the company has met the requirements of each element of the system and to what degree.

Evidence based-conclusions and recommendations are based on valid, sufficient and authentic evidence with all gaps clearly identified.

Flexible-ensuring that the audit is conducted with minimum interruption and distraction to the organisation, and its operations.

¹ Lessons from Longford

² Audit Principles and Concepts

³ AQTF Audit Handbook



Focussed on continuous improvement-to encourage the organisation to show where it has met the requirements of the system and to identify areas for improvement along with identifying company strengths.

Fair, open and transparent, to inform all persons involved of the process in advance and give reasonable opportunity to provide evidence of compliance.

Successfully managed audits follow a simple process:

Planning the audit-have the scope and understand the people involved in the audit process as well as confirming those resources.

Opening the Audit-to provide the organisation an opportunity to provide the audit team with an overview of the business and for the audit team to provide the organisation with the process to be undertaken to complete the audit.

Collecting Evidence-evidence is collected through interviews, document review and site implementation.

Analysing the evidence-this occurs throughout the audit process and is the process of examining and validating the evidence provided which in turn develops conclusions and recommendations.

Providing feedback-this occurs at the closing meeting and provides the audit team the ability to confirm the basis of their findings with the organisation. It also allows the audit team to thank those involved, highlight the organisations strengths and discuss any opportunities for improvement.

Developing the audit report-should be clear and accurate and provided as soon as possible after the audit.

Auditors must be ethical in their conduct, they must report truthfully and accurately the audit findings, they must use due professional care through the application of diligence and good judgement, they must remain impartial and objective and the evidence must be verifiable.

Good quality audits that elicit accurate information delivered to the corporate / executive teams can assist in diverting disaster. Remember - *“Continuous good news – you worry”*.