



What is a health and safety management system audit?

The audit is a comprehensive review of an employer's health and safety management system. To qualify for a COR an audit must be conducted by a certified external auditor who is not affiliated with the employer. The certified auditor must use an audit instrument that is approved for the Partnerships program, is appropriate to the industry and operations of the employer, and is acceptable to a Certifying Partner. An audit typically covers the basic elements of a health and safety management system (outlined in InfoSheet 2) and can include personnel interviews, a documentation review and workplace observation by the certified auditor.

What is an audit instrument?

An audit instrument is a written protocol that organizes audit procedures into a sequence of steps and specifies the actions to be taken by an auditor. It includes instructions on scoring points for the specific elements of the health and safety management system being evaluated.

The audit instrument guides the auditor in evaluating specific elements of the health and safety management system. The auditor interviews personnel, reviews documents and observes workplace conditions and practices.

Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry, Workplace Partnerships (AEII) maintains the Partnerships audit standard against which audit instruments are evaluated and compared. Only those instruments that meet this audit standard will be accepted when carrying out an audit for a COR.

Which audit instruments are acceptable to AEII?

Each Certifying Partner has a list of approved audit instruments that they will accept for review towards a COR.

What is an external audit?

An external audit is a systematic review carried out by a certified auditor who is considered external to the employer being audited. The auditor selected cannot be involved in the development or implementation of the health and safety system being audited as this may place the auditor in a conflict of interest position.

In order to acquire (or renew) a COR, employers must arrange for an external audit to demonstrate that their health and safety management system meets the standards required for issuing or renewing a COR.

What is a maintenance audit?

A maintenance audit is a systematic review carried out by a certified auditor who may work for the employer being evaluated and is trained and knowledgeable in the audit instrument being used.

To maintain a COR, an employer is required to have a maintenance audit conducted during the first and second years after the COR issue date. Maintenance audits, like external audits, must be reviewed by a Certifying Partner for quality assurance.

Employers who do not have an employee qualified to conduct an audit may choose to have an external audit carried out each year. In this case, the audit may qualify for an early renewal of the COR.

What is a peer audit?

A peer audit is a systematic review carried out by a certified auditor who works for another employer involved in the Partnerships program. This generally occurs when employers in similar industry classifications choose to arrange audits among themselves through a common Certifying Partner.

The employer receiving the peer audit is expected to provide one of its employees (also a certified auditor) to carry out a non-reciprocal audit of another employer in the group. Arrangements are made through a Certifying Partner for peer audits, either as an external audit to qualify for or renew a COR, or as a COR maintenance audit.

How do I find a certified auditor to conduct a COR audit?

Employers ready to arrange a health and safety management system audit should contact an appropriate Certifying Partner to request the audit. Employers should discuss which audit instrument is to be used with the Certifying Partner and ensure that the auditor selected is qualified.

If the employer wants to use a particular auditor it should ensure that the Certifying Partner would accept the completed audit for review, prior to arranging for the audit.

How much do certified auditors charge?

There is no predetermined fee schedule. Each employer is responsible for negotiating their own contract with an auditor. Fees are negotiable at the time the audit is arranged.

The cost of an audit varies depending on the size and complexity of the employer's operations. Auditors usually quote a daily rate (\$300 - \$800). The number of days required is based on the number of employees to be interviewed, sites to be visited, documents to be reviewed and the scope of operations to be included in the overall audit process.

You should check the auditor's credentials and ask for references before agreeing to a fee and signing a contract.

A Certifying Partner may take on the role of arranging an audit on behalf of an employer. In this case the Certifying Partner may have a service fee schedule.

How long does an audit take to complete?

The length of time it takes to complete an audit depends upon the size, complexity and scope of operations to be audited. For an employer with a single operational site and less than 50 employees, an audit may take three or four days.

The time involved will increase with the number of employees to be interviewed, number and complexity of operations to be reviewed and the geographic scope of the employer's operations.

How long does it take to get my COR after the audit is completed?

To qualify for a COR, the final audit report (including audit instrument and auditor notes) must be forwarded to a Certifying Partner for a quality assurance review within 45 days of completion, accompanied by a request to review the audit and issue a COR.

The time required for the quality assurance review process varies depending on the complexity and size of the audit being reviewed and the workload of the Certifying Partner. Employers should anticipate a period of approximately one month between the submission of the audit report to a Certifying Partner and the issuance of the COR.

If I have more than one WCB account number and/or industry code can one audit and COR cover them all?

Before arranging for an audit, employers should determine which operations and/or facilities are to be covered. One audit can be used to cover all the operations of a single employer, however, when applying for a COR the employer must specify which Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) account number(s), industry code(s) and facilities are covered by the audit.

Note: Only one WCB account number can be linked to an individual COR, but multiple industry codes and/or facilities can be assigned to an individual COR.

If I acquire/merge with another employer, or sell part of my operation, does the existing COR still apply to the new organization?

When an employer changes the structure of their business operations, the management system intrinsic to those operations including health and safety policies, may also be affected.

If the management system audited for the original COR changes significantly as a result of the acquisition/merger or sale, the original COR is not considered valid and a new audit would be required.

To obtain the most current information, contact the Workplace Health and Safety Contact Centre (780) 415-8690 (toll free 1-866-415-8690) or visit our website at industry.alberta.ca/whs-partnerships