

EXTRACT FROM PROCEDURE ON REMOTE AUDITS

Introduction

In a normal business environment, every organization is continuously exposed to opportunities, challenges, and risks. However, extraordinary events or circumstances beyond the control of the organization can happen. This procedure describes Management of Extraordinary Events or Circumstances affecting Vexil and Clients, for the proper maintenance of certification.

It is important for VEXIL to be able to:

- Demonstrate reasonable due diligence, mutual understanding and trust; and
- Establish an appropriate course of action in response to extraordinary events.

This procedure is not intended to override requirements in standards or schemes. Where a standard or scheme provides no flexibility regardless of the crises that has occurred, guidance and an agreed way ahead would always be sought from the relevant accreditation body or scheme owner.

This document explains the content and process for conducting a remote audit. It does not cover scenarios in which a remote audit cannot take place, for example, due to a lack of available technology at the site, or due to the site being unwilling to permit a remote audit.

The processes described aim to facilitate Vexil decisions on whether a certification can be continued/extended/granted or not. It is therefore important that the process is operated in such a way that the Vexil has sufficient confidence in site operations before a certification decision is made. Where it is not possible to gain this level of confidence, it may be necessary for a new certificate to be refused and in case of recertification the normal certificate expiry date (and processes) will apply.

Definitions

Extraordinary event or circumstance: A circumstance beyond the control of the organization, commonly referred to as “Force Majeure” or “act of God”. Examples are war, strike, riot, political instability, geopolitical tension, terrorism, crime, pandemic, flooding, earthquake, malicious computer hacking, other natural or man-made disasters.

Extraordinary event or circumstance affecting a certified organization: An extraordinary event affecting a certified organization or Vexil may temporarily prevent Vexil from carrying out planned audits on-site. When such a situation occurs, Vexil, operating under recognised standards or regulatory documents, needs to establish (in consultation with certified organizations) a reasonable planned course of action.

Remote Audit: An audit conducted remotely by an audit team using Computer Assisted Auditing Technique (CAAT) which may include teleconferencing, webinar/web meeting, online video/audible services (whatsApp, Skype etc), interactive web-based communication or remote electronic access to the management system documentation and/or management system processes and other electronic means.

Virtual site: A virtual site is an online environment allowing persons to execute processes, for example through cloud, team-viewer and others.

Process

Vexil has established the documented process in P2701, outlining the steps Vexil will take in the event a Client is affected by an extraordinary event. This procedure is defining the alternate potential short-term methods of assessing the organization to verify effectiveness of its management systems.

Necessary information, as appropriate, is collected from the client organizations. Whenever the risk of continuing certification is adjudged as low/manageable, and based on the collected information, Vexil shall consider alternative short-term methods of assessment to verify continuing system effectiveness for the organization. This shall include requesting relevant documentation (for example, management review meeting minutes, corrective action records, results of internal audits, test/inspection reports, etc.) to be reviewed offsite by Vexil auditors to determine continuing suitability of the certification (on a short-term basis only).

The process takes care of the following items:

- i) Proactive communication between the affected certified organization and Vexil.
- ii) Steps Vexil will take to assess the affected organization and how the plan to move forward will be communicated.
- iii) Specifying the maximum time an alternative short-term assessment method could be used before suspension or withdrawal of certification. At present, the maximum time is considered as 3 months which may be extended to 6 months with the approval of Managing Director of Vexil, based on the continuing extraordinary event/Circumstance.
- iv) This procedure has been developed keeping in mind the present COVID-19 pandemic/epidemic. Once the WHO/respective governments declare the World/Nation free of this pandemic/epidemic, the normal oversight shall be reinstated as per the existing on-site methods for assessments.
- v) Possible amendments to organization's oversight plans on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with Client/Vexil procedures.
- vi) Ensuring that any accreditation guidelines for managing the extraordinary events/circumstances are followed.

Breakdown of certified organization: In case the certified organization is not able to recuperate from the extraordinary event or circumstances that affected the organization's business and/or If contact with the organization cannot be made, Vexil shall follow normal processes and procedures for suspension, cancelation and withdrawal of certification, as per procedure P2401.

Vexil ensures that auditors are fully briefed on the appropriate processes. Whilst remote audits will create some challenges, it is important that the integrity and quality of the audit process is maintained.

It is unlikely that, during the audit, all of the requirements of the Standard are audited remotely, within the specified audit duration. Priority is therefore given to those key processes which have the greatest impact on product safety and integrity/environment/occupational health & safety/Energy use.

Verification of Corrective Actions: Generally the normal process to verify and close non-conformances shall be followed. However, Where an open non-conformity cannot be effectively evaluated by remote audit techniques, then Vexil shall evaluate the risks to continued certification and act accordingly. This may lead to escalating the non-conformity to suspension of certification,

or extending the time to enable evaluation of the non-conformity (for example, when a site audit is possible). Where an open nonconformity is evaluated and it cannot be closed, the usual processes concerning non-conformity management shall be followed.

The most important is the confidence that process of certification in being able to make certification decisions (continuation/certification/recertification/others) based on the remote assessment.

References

IAF ID3 (latest version unless specified)

IAF MD04 (latest version unless specified)

Audit Plan (F1602)

Attendance sheet (F1603)

Audit report (F1601)

Mandays requirements & Guidance (W1605)

ISO/IEC 17021-1 (latest version unless specified)

Procedure P2401

Corrective action plan, if applicable

Register of application of P2701