

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDITING

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What is an environmental audit?

An environmental audit is a management tool consisting of a systematic, documented, periodic and objective evaluation of environmental performance, management systems and equipment. An audit could be:

- An internal review of systems and procedures for measuring, recording and reporting environmental performance;
- An internal or external validation of a company's environmental management systems; or
- Independent evaluations and commentaries by external experts regarding an organisation's environmental, and social performance and/or management processes.

Simply put, an audit is an assessment of environmental risk, controls and improvement opportunities to determine how effective they are and if they are being used.

What are the different types of environmental audits?

Audits can be voluntary, mandatory or statutory. Voluntary audits are audits that an organization conducts without compulsion from a regulatory authority or are not mandated by law, e.g. environmental management audits, compliance audits, due diligence audits or EMS audits voluntary commissioned by the organisation. Mandatory audits are required by a regulatory document such as a licence, permit, authority, approval order or notice under legal powers held by the regulator. Statutory audits are audits that are compulsory under legislation, e.g. industrial facility audits



What are the benefits of environmental auditing?

Benefits vary depending on the objectives and scope of the audit, and include:

- Organisations understand how to meet their legal requirements;
- Meeting specific statutory reporting requirements;
- Organisations can demonstrate they are environmentally responsible;
- Organisations can demonstrate their environmental policy is implemented;
- Understanding environmental interactions of products, services & activities,
- Knowing their environmental risks are managed appropriately;
- Understanding how to develop and implement an ISO 14001 EMS; and
- Improving environmental performance and saving money.

Overall, environmental audits can provide assurance to management on whether the organization is meeting their environmental management objectives.

Personal Attributes of an Auditor

Environmental Auditors should have personal attributes, such as ethics, open-mindedness, perceptiveness and tact. They must have an understanding of audit principles, procedures and techniques, as well as have gained experience through conducting audits. Auditors should know the

subject matter they are auditing and how this applies to different organisations. ISO 19011:2012 Guidelines for auditing management systems provides information regarding the choice of Environmental Auditor.

Who should complete an environmental audit?

Environmental audits can be undertaken by internal experienced professional or an external auditor. It is not uncommon for an experienced Environmental Professional can conduct in-house environmental audits. Where audits are conducted in-house, it is worth using personnel from a different site. This way they are not 100% familiar with the site, procedures or people and are focused on the audit and not personal relationships. Where an audit is Mandatory or for a Statutory purpose, the audit typically needs to be completed by a certified auditor and may need to be external to the company. Depending on the auditing requirements consideration could be given to determining whether the Auditor needs to be certified.



Advantages of using external auditors

Having an external auditor brings a number of benefits, including, reducing or avoiding the independence and familiarity of issues and threats. It is likely that external auditors will have no link to anybody inside the organisation being audited and so there will be fewer prior friendships and personal relationships to consider.

Second, the fact that these threats are avoided or reduced will create a higher degree of confidence for the organisations' management and, where applicable, regulators.

Third, any external auditor brings a fresh pair of eyes to the task, identifying issues that internal auditors may have overlooked because of familiarity. When internal employees audit a system or department, they may be so familiar with the organisation's routines, procedures, culture, and norms that a key risk might be overlooked or wrongly assessed.

And lastly, best practice and new developments can be introduced through external resources. An external auditor is engaged by multiple companies varying in sizes and is exposed to a range processing, equipment and approaches which they are asked to review to determine effectiveness. Depending on the scope of the audit they can be called upon to provide advice on new approaches or improvement opportunities.

How Integrate Sustainability can help you.

Integrate sustainability has over 30 years combined experience in environmental reviews and auditing and can provide assistance with environmental compliance audits, environmental management/performance reviews, including auditing of Environmental Management Systems (EMS). Contact our team (08 9466 0338) or enquiries@integratesustainability.com.au at to discuss your environmental auditing requirements today.