



Safety and Health Audits: Benchmarking for Performance Improvement

What methods do you use to assure that your safety and health programs are moving in the right direction? One method many employers use is the periodic performance of safety and health audits. In doing so, they are benchmarking against:

- Themselves back to the dates of earlier audits
- Others in their class of business, and
- The standards and guidelines which are applicable to their activities.

Measuring against established standards and guidelines is a way to promote performance improvement and prevent performance degradation. Rewards are often coupled to this measurement. It is human nature to respond first to that for which you know there is an established measure (performance criteria) and a reward or punishment likely based on your performance.

There are a number of occupational health and safety managements systems against which you can benchmark your performance, including the following:

- ANSI/AIHA Z10-2005, *Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems*
- National Safety Council (NSC) 2005, *Safety and Health Code of Ethics Resource Guide*
- OHSAS 18001/18002: 2000, *Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems*
- OSHA CSP 03-01-003 (TED 8.4), *Voluntary Protection Program (VPP): Policies and Procedures Manual*, April 18, 2008
- OSHA Standards for your industry and nature of operations
- The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania *Accident and Illness Prevention Program (AIPP) Program Elements*
- Safety and Health Audit Protocols developed specifically by or for your employer.

Safety and health audits may be performed by internal staff, outside consultants, or a mix of both. Oftentimes companies will invite “guest auditors” from other business units or sites within an operating employer to assist with the audit, allowing them to share their expertise and bring back information on the process to their sites. Outside consultants may bring both their expertise in the areas being evaluated and “another set of eyes” to the process.

Typically audits begin with a pre-audit review of client documents, the nature and scope of operations, and workplace injuries and illnesses with the goal of determining expected hazards

and potential exposures. An audit protocol is developed and used that defines the way the audit will be conducted, what benchmarks will be used, and how the results of the audit will be communicated.

The onsite portion of the audit normally begins with a kickoff meeting, site inspection, review of pertinent documents and records, interviews, and frequent discussions. Specific findings are discussed as they arise so that there are no surprises late in the audit process. Audits normally take 1 to 5 days, with from 1-4 auditors depending on the type, size, and complexity of site to be audited. Draft reports are typically presented before leaving the site.

What benefits do health and safety audits provide? Following is a partial listing:

- Provide a snapshot of existing deficiencies
- Allow measures of progress since the last evaluation
- Offer the ability to review compliance with new requirements
- Enable re-prioritization of performance improvement efforts
- Establish safety and health programs that are more effective and efficient.

The professionals at 1Source have been providing safety and health auditing services for over 25 years with hundreds of audits performed. This has helped clients to become OSHA VPP Star Participants, win National Safety Council awards, and dramatically reduce the cost of workplace injuries and illnesses. Do you need more information or a proposal? If so, contact Colin J. Brigham, CIH, CSP, CPE, CPEA at 888-873-9983, ext. 24 or at cbrigham@1ssh.com.

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