



PROTECTION CONCEPT OF CERTIFICATION BODIES FOR AUDITS AND INSPECTIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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CERTIFICATION BODIES



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1 INITIAL SITUATION, PURPOSE AND APPLICABILITY

The coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which causes the respiratory disease COVID-19, assumed the scale of a pandemic in the first quarter of 2020. This led to a so-called shutdown or lockdown in many regions and countries. For many services or manufacturing processes, this means that they can either no longer be provided or handled at all or only with restrictions. The same applies to the performance of audits and inspections by certification companies.

The present protection concept was developed in cooperation between the two certification bodies ProCert and SQS for the performance of management system and product certification audits. It is open to other certification bodies to join the protection concept and support its further development.

The purpose of this protection concept for audits and inspections (inspections hereafter included in the term audit) is to describe measures for the protection of the auditor (also in audit teams and for witnesses or observers) and the employees of the company, in addition to the requirements issued by authorities, companies and other stakeholders. It is conceivable that further protective measures may be introduced for individual industries and standards; these will be handled by the certification bodies listed here in addition to this concept.

The protection concept is applicable for announced and unannounced audits, subject to possible requirements of the standard or certification programme.

It is permissible to take other measures if the health protection of the auditor and the company's employees continues to be guaranteed or even improved (e.g. use of face visors instead of hygiene masks).

The audit will not take place if it becomes apparent during the planning and preparation of the audit that the protective measures are insufficiently defined or are inadequately implemented.

The audit can be interrupted at any time by the company or by the auditor if consistent compliance with the protective measures is not ensured. Depending on the standard, an aborted audit means that the audit is repeated or a supplementary audit is carried out.

The present protection concept is continuously updated and adapted to the development of the pandemic.

2 COMMUNICATION ON PROTECTIVE MEASURES AND HEALTH STATUS

The company must be informed of this protection concept before the audit.

The company, the auditor and the certification body shall immediately inform each other about persons tested positively for COVID-19, which have been identified in a time window of 14 days before and after the scheduled audit and which could have an influence on the audit participants. Possible official instructions shall also be communicated.

The company must inform the auditor about company or sector-specific measures for the protection of persons (employees, visitors) among other things about:



declaration of health status



obligation to wear a mask (mouth and nose protector)



provision of disinfectant

The auditor shall comply with these requirements accordingly.

The company ensures that the employees are informed about the audit procedure based on the requirements of this protection concept.

3 AUDIT PREPARATION

3.1 AUDIT PLANNING

The planning of the audit, including communication (see chapter 2), should be started early so that the company has sufficient time to ensure that technical and/or organisational arrangements are in place to meet these requirements.

3.2 AUDIT TEAMS AND SUPPORT

Audit teams and other persons with observation and witnessing duties are permitted, subject to compliance with the protective measures and the requirements of the standard setters.

3.3 ARRIVAL, OVERNIGHT STAY AND CATERING

The auditor travels in his own car or a rental car if possible and if the distance allows it.

If public transport is used, the auditor will discuss travel times and routes with the company in order to avoid large crowds of people on the way.

Auditors whose deployment is unavoidable (e.g. for licensing reasons) and who are part of the risk group in the certification body's analysis must protect themselves with a mouth and nose protector (FFP 2) when using public transport.

The local accommodation and catering facilities will be discussed together, if necessary. Compliance with the pandemic protection measures must be ensured in any case.

3.4 ADAPTATION OF THE AUDIT PLAN (IF AVAILABLE)

As a result of the audit preparation, the audit plan is adjusted if necessary in order to implement these protective measures.

Sufficient time should be scheduled for the change of audit sequences so that the auditor has sufficient time for personal protective measures (e.g. washing hands, see chapter 4.1).

The logic of the audit process ensures that there is no hectic rush and unnecessary shifts within the company.

4 ON-SITE AUDIT

4.1 GENERAL RULES

Before the audit begins, after breaks and other audit interruptions, as well as each time the audit sequences change, the auditor washes his or her hands – in compliance with the FOPH recommendation (*), i.e. in detail:



1
Wet hands under running water



2
Soap hands with liquid soap



3
Rub your hands until it foams
(not forget to rub the back of the hand, between the fingers, under the fingernails and the wrists as well)



4
Rinse hands thoroughly under running water



5
Dry hands with disposable paper towel



6
Close water tap with disposable paper towel

(*) Federal Office of Public Health

<https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/hygiene-pandemiefall/haende-waschen.html>

In the case of audit sequences of longer duration, hands must be disinfected in between. This also applies after the exchange of documents and after touching doors, stair railings etc.

If the auditor is dependent on personal care and disinfection material because of sensitive skin, it is permitted to use it.

The auditor must clean and disinfect the personal IT infrastructure and personal utensils as required.

All persons involved in an audit sequence wear a mouth and nose protector (quality according to the recommendations of the responsible authorities) as soon as social distance rules cannot be consistently observed.

The number of persons participating in an audit sequence should be kept small if possible. Official restrictions for meetings must be observed. If the standard and the IT infrastructure available on site as well as the access authorization allow it, employees of the company can be called in from the home office or from another office via a video conference tool.

Wherever possible, documents should be presented and exchanged digitally.

If several persons are working in the same room or in the case of major temporary personnel shifts, the auditor can order an audit plan change as an immediate measure and postpone the audit sequence to a different time of day if this will better ensure compliance with the protective measures.

Protective material such as hygiene masks must be ready to hand at all times in order to be able to react to unexpected audit situations.

4.2 OPENING AND CLOSURE MEETING

The physical presence at the opening and closure meetings should generally be kept to a minimum in order to comply with social distancing and the official assembly restrictions.

The top management as well as the QMS management or the person responsible for the standard must be represented among the participants. These can also be included by digital communication media, unless the standard does not allow it.

4.3 ROOM OR OFFICE FOR INTERVIEWS

The largest possible meeting rooms or offices should be provided for the audit interviews. Captive (windowless) rooms should be avoided. The assigned rooms should be well ventilated before each audit sequence and during longer audit sequences.

The audit sequences that normally take place at the workplace are moved to the meeting room if possible.

Within an audit sequence, the designated persons should not be summoned to the meeting room. They can be included via digital communication media.

4.4 PRODUCTION AREA AUDIT

In the production environment, the auditor avoids interviews with people on the line when noise exposure makes it impossible to comply with the distance rules. The auditor is allowed to take pictures or videos or to commission the company, which are then discussed. Care must be taken to ensure that no pictures or videos of people are taken. The recordings by the auditor will be irrevocably deleted after the discussion.

Some standards require that certain activities be performed in the presence of the auditor (e.g. testing the metal detector). Appropriate precautions must be taken (e.g. wearing of masks).