



Introduction:

The traditional methodology used for auditing organizations, based on ISO/IEC 17011 has involved physical office/site Audit of the Organization.

There have been growing reasons, needs and capabilities in recent years that challenge the effectiveness of this traditional methodology. Because of Organizations carrying out work on a global scale, at a multitude of locations and with the advent of significant technological advances, these Organizations are more ubiquitous but remain operating on fairly centralized networks that are replicated from one place to the next.

Organizations today are able to create virtual sites that allow persons from different physical locations to execute processes. It is an on-line environment in which processes are executed, where demonstration of evidence, conformity or traceability can be confirmed via electronic means

Purpose

This document describes the process for determining the actions to be taken by TQ Cert/ TQ Services in event of any emergency situation which may prevent TQ Cert's access to its certified or applicant client organizations, such that its planned audits (initial, surveillance or recertification visits) cannot be conducted on that time.

Scope

This applies to all accredited management system audits to be conducted in any of the emergency identified by the TQ Cert, Accreditation body or by the government.

Objective

The objective of this procedure is to establish the level of confidence in the TQ Cert's audit and certification processes of client organizations by conducting remote audit and compliance to applicable accreditation requirements by direct observations carried out through an electronic medium.

This document describes how TQ Cert will utilize remote audits under permitted conditions by government or accreditation body and by TQ Cert (Example, in times of extraordinary event or circumstances) to make its certification processes more effective and efficient, and at the same time provide IT based audits for its certified client organizations.

Responsibility

- Certification Manager - To verify the possible and potential risks in continuing certification and to carryout audit activities and identify the expected future period, in a likely event that a certified / applicant organization is affected by an extraordinary event and to approve and advice the necessary measures to implement this procedure,

if necessary recommending alternate potential short-term methods of assessing the organization to verify continuing effectiveness of its management system.
- Scheme Managers - To identify and assess the certified / applicant organization situations by analyzing information to enable TQ Cert to decide appropriate cause of action in view of continuing certification and to plan audit activities by following the requirements of accreditation body, IAF guidelines, standard and legal requirements.
- Auditors & Coordinators - To maintain communication with the applicant / client organization facing the emergency situation and to collect necessary information that enable TQ Cert to assess the



emergency situation to take necessary and appropriate actions.

Definitions

1. 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.

2. Virtual location

A location where a client organization performs work or provides a service using an on-line environment allowing persons irrespective of physical locations to execute processes.

Note 1:

A virtual site cannot be considered where the processes must be executed in a physical environment, e.g., warehousing, manufacturing, physical testing laboratories, installation or repairs to physical products.

Note 2:

A virtual site (e.g. company intranet) is considered a single site for the calculation of audit time.

3. ICT

It is the use of technology for gathering, storing, retrieving, processing, analyzing and transmitting information. It includes software and hardware such as smartphones, handheld devices, laptop computers, desktop computers, drones, video cameras, wearable technology, artificial intelligence, and others. The use of ICT may be appropriate for audit both locally and remotely.

Examples of the use of ICT during audits/audit s may include but are not limited to:

- a) Meetings; by means of teleconference facilities, including audio, video and data sharing
- b) Audit of documents and records by means of remote access, either synchronously (in real time) or asynchronously (when applicable)
- c) Recording of information and evidence by means of still video, video or audio recordings •
- d) Providing visual/audio access to remote or potentially hazardous locations

4. Remote Audit:

An audit of the physical location or virtual site of client organization, using electronic means.

Examples of remote audit include: webinars/web meetings, teleconferences, online video/audio services, remote access to organization’s data processing and management systems, databases, etc.

Eligibility Criteria for Remote Audit

The acceptability of and the extent of remote audit techniques will vary from organization to organization and will depend on circumstances such as level of technology available to the organization, the organization’s audit preference, resources, etc.



TQ Cert shall use remote audit on a voluntary basis, by mutual agreement, or may be initiated by the TQ Cert as per certification or accreditation needs (initial office audit for a new standard or another standard within the same accreditation scheme, surveillance, investigations, verifications, etc.).

TQ Cert will carry out the remote audit after review of the need and certification risk on case by case basis. The decision on use of remote audit methodology would be taken by TQ Cert Head of Certification depending on the complexities involved.

Permitted Conditions for Remote Audit

Remote audit is permitted by TQ Cert under one or more of the following conditions:

1. When a certified client organization is seeking certification for a new scheme / standard within the same accreditation scheme. (For example, QMS certified organization seeking another management certification such as EMS)
2. The number of sites to be audited is difficult for TQ Cert to completely fulfil within its timeframe (to be correlated with requirements for site sampling by IAF MD 1:2018)
3. The audit is for a minor extension to scope of certification already granted by TQ Cert
4. The situation requires the audit team to come back for a follow up audit, but another visit is not easily achievable within a short time frame
5. Office audit of another location of the client organization for the currently accredited scope.
6. Complaint investigation
7. Verification of corrective action implementation
8. When timing of the audit does not support the travel logistics required to conduct the audit on site
9. Travel to a client organization or specific location is not reasonable (i.e., for safety reasons, travel restrictions, etc.)
10. Onsite office audit is not possible due to a circumstance beyond the control of the organization, commonly referred to as "Force Majeure" or "Act of God" as defined in IAF ID 3 document or in NABCB Policy on Management of Extraordinary Events or Circumstances.
11. Client organization has a proven track record of conformance at the location of the remote audit and TQ Cert has determined the activity as low risk level.
12. An activity planned for the on-site audit could not be completed and extending the on-site audit is not the best resolution.
13. Unavoidable changes in scheduling for the audit team/auditor or TQ Cert, personal issues, change in business priorities, etc.
14. TQ cert is confident that the audit objectives can be achieved via remote audit activities.
15. An on-site audit is not required for the relevant standard or scheme.
16. In case of new applicant, TQ Cert (new entity seeking accreditation from NABCB for the first time), the initial office assessment may be conducted partly remote and partly on-site (with at least one assessor present on-site during initial office assessment). However, remote witness assessments, based on risk assessment, may be carried out in schemes/standards where there is no restriction by scheme owner.
17. In case partly on-site assessment is not possible, a complete remote assessment may be conducted based on results of risk assessment by NABCB, and in such case, the first annual surveillance assessment shall be conducted on-site after grant of initial accreditation. Alternatively, first annual surveillance assessment may be conducted remotely, where it is not feasible to visit onsite in view of the risk arising from extraordinary situation.



Remote audits may be considered for use when

- i. There are unavoidable changes in scheduling for the auditor or organization (i.e., personal issues, change in business priorities, etc.).
- ii. The organization has systematic implementation of its management system where records, data, etc. can be reviewed at any site, despite where the work is being performed.
- iii. The risk level of the assessment is of low concern to the TQ Cert.
- iv. TQ Cert has an auditor (or team of auditors) already familiar with the Management System and its practices and who have visited the Organizations headquarters.

Conditions not permitted for Remote Audit

Remote Audit is not permitted in the following conditions:

1. When the client organization has a history of non-conformance at the location being assessed.
2. During initial assessment activity of a new organization's facility, scope, or significant change.
3. Where the scope and/or the scope of activity is critical / high risk, and requires an on-site audit
4. The client organization has changed location and/or address
5. When no on-site assessment has taken place for more than 15 months' time.
6. When TQ Cert auditors are observed for their auditing performance (internal witness audits).

Qualification Criteria for Remote Audit

TQ Cert will qualify the eligibility criteria of the client organization for remote audit as described above. In addition, TQ Cert will look in to the following criteria to qualify the client organization for remote audit:

1. All the information (records, data, documents etc.) of the client organization are readily available in electronic formats or document reader.
2. The client organization has virtual meeting capabilities, including audio (and video when used), aptitude, and resources (on-site IT, personnel, and tools) as that of TQ Cert auditor / audit team.
3. The client organization and the audit team are competent to navigate an online meeting, and remote personnel are competent to participate.
4. The client organization is able to provide a representative that is capable of communicating in the same language as TQ Cert auditor / audit team.
5. Difference of time zone, if any, must be supportive to client organization and TQ Cert auditor / audit team.
6. The client organization is ready for any additional expenses associated with the remote audit process such as fees for teleconference, webinar, audio/visual, etc.
7. Remote audit is not prohibited by the standards or scheme requirement.

Procedure:

1. Collecting Information on Extraordinary event or circumstance affecting a Certified Organization / TQ Cert.

An extraordinary event affecting a certified organization or TQC, which may temporarily prevent TQ Cert from carrying out planned audits on-site. (Refer: Definitions)



When such a situation occurs, TQ Cert, in consultation with certified organizations, establishes a reasonable planned course of action. It is ensured that the reasonable plan of actions determined are as per the requirements of accreditation body, IAF guidelines, legal and regulatory requirements.

- a) TQ Cert gathers necessary information from the applicant / certified organization before deciding on an appropriate course of action, to enable itself to assess risk for continuing certification and understand the applicant / certified organization's current and expected future situation.
- b) The information collected by the TQ Cert includes the following as appropriate:
 - i. The next immediate reasonable time expected by the organization be able to function normally?
 - ii. The expected time for the organization to be able to ship products or perform the service defined within the current scope of certification?
 - iii. Is the organization needed to use alternative manufacturing and/or distribution sites? If so, are these currently covered under the current scope of certification or will they need to be evaluated in addition?
 - iv. Does existing inventory still meet customer specifications or will the certified organization contact its customers regarding possible concessions?
 - v. If the certified organization is certified to a management system standard that requires a disaster recovery plan or emergency response plan, has the certified organization implemented the plan and was it effective?
 - vi. Will some of the processes and/or services performed or products shipped be subcontracted to other organizations? If so, how will the other organizations' activities be controlled by the certified organization?
 - vii. The details such as to what extent has operation of the management system been affected?
 - viii. Has the Certified organization conducted an impact audit?
 - ix. Identification of alternative sampling sites, as appropriate.

2. Assessing the information on Emergency Situation

TQ Cert analyses the collected information on client's emergency situation and if the risk of continuing certification is low, and based on the collected information (example, using a suitable questionnaire) it may consider alternative short-term methods of audit to verify continuing system effectiveness for the organization.

This may include requesting relevant documentation along with questionnaire (documents for example, management review meeting minutes, corrective action records, results of internal audits, test/inspection reports, etc.) to be reviewed off site by the TQ Cert to determine continuing suitability of the certification (on a short-term basis only).

At a minimum, the process addresses the following items:

- a) Proactive communication and method of communication between the affected certified organization and the TQ Cert.
- b) Steps the TQ Cert will take to assess the affected organization and how the plan to move forward will be communicated.
- c) Specifying the maximum time an alternative short-term audit method could be used before suspension or withdrawal of certification.
- d) Criteria for renewing normal oversight, including the method and timing of any reinstatement activities and audits.
- e) Possible amendments to organization's oversight plans on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with TQ Cert



procedures.

- f) Ensuring that any deviation from accreditation requirements and TQ Cert procedures is justified and documented, and agreement reached with the accreditation body on plans to address temporary deviations from requirements.
- g) Re-establishment of surveillance/recertification activities according to TQ Cert oversight plans when access to the affected location is re-established.

Note:

If contact with the client organization cannot be made, TQ Cert follow normal processes and procedures for suspension and withdrawal of certification.

3. Plan of Actions based on Audits Types

a) First Surveillance Audit:

Under normal circumstances, the first surveillance audit after initial certification is initiated from nine months and is completed within 12 months from Certification Decision date (ISO 17021: 2015)

However, providing that sufficient evidence has been collected based on above methods, to provide confidence that the certified management system is effective consideration may be given to postpone the first surveillance for a period not normally exceeding 6 months (18 months from date of initial certification). Otherwise the certificate will be suspended or the scope reduced.

b) Subsequent Surveillance Audits

There may be specific circumstances by which TQ Cert can possibly justify the adjustment of the timing of a subsequent surveillance audit.

If the client organization has to shut down completely for a limited period of time (less than 6 months), it would be reasonable for TQ Cert to postpone an audit that had been scheduled to occur during the shutdown until the organization resumes operations.

Note:

The organization is required to inform the TQ Cert when operations resume so that the TQ Cert can conduct the audit promptly.

c) Recertification Audits

Under normal circumstances the recertification audit is completed and the recertification decision made prior to expiration to avoid loss of certification (ISO/IEC 17021 -1).

However, providing that sufficient evidence has been collected as above, to provide confidence that the certified management system is effective consideration may be given to extend the certification for a period not normally exceeding 6 months beyond the original expiry date.

The re-certification is to be carried out within this permissible extended period. Otherwise, a new initial audit should be performed. In this case, it is ensured that the expiration of the renewed certification is based on the original recertification cycle and will not be extended.

d) Information to the AB



It will be ensured by TQ Cert to record all deviations from the established certification program and made available to ABs upon request, with necessary documentation of such information.

4. TQ Cert Planned Actions for conducting audits *(in case of an identified extra ordinary event or circumstance)*

- a) TQ Cert suitably conducts a risk audit of its certifications and in extending their continuity by identifying the consequences of the emergency situation and its impact on the certified organization's capability in maintaining the effectiveness of the certified management system.
- b) It is expected that certified organizations increase the frequency of internal audits and MRMs during emergency situation in support of the management systems and to ensure continued compliance towards the certified management system standard requirements.
- c) TQ Cert also identified the complexities (scope / site complexity, language and time zone difference between the site and auditor's location etc.) and limitations for applying ICT (if the specific certification scheme or accreditation requirements permits the use of ICT for the scope defined)
- d) TQ Cert suitably identify the method of conducting remote audits applying the suitable information and communication technology (ICT) (for example, use of Skype) and requirements of accreditation and IAF MD 4.
- e) TQ Cert is to ensure the security and confidentiality of electronic or electronically-transmitted information when using ICT for audit purposes.
- f) TQ Cert and the client organization selected for ICT, mutually agree the audit in accordance with information security and data protection measures and regulations before ICT is used for audit purposes.
- g) In the case of non-fulfilment of these measures or non-agreement of information security and data protection measures, TQ cert shall use other methods to conduct the audit and to fulfil audit objectives.
- h) TQ Cert identifies and document the risks and opportunities that may impact audit effectiveness for each use of ICT under the same conditions, including the selection of the technologies, and how they are managed.
- i) When ICT is proposed for the audit activities, the application review shall include a check that the client and the TQ Cert have the necessary infrastructure to support the use of the ICT proposed.
- j) Upon considering the risks and opportunities identified by TQ Cert, the audit plan shall identify how ICT will be utilized by TQ Cert and the extent to which ICT will be used for audit purposes to optimize audit effectiveness and efficiency while maintaining the integrity of the audit process.
- k) When using ICT, TQ Cert shall ensure its auditors and other involved persons (e.g. drone pilots, technical experts) shall have the competency and ability to understand and utilize the information and communication technologies employed to achieve the desired results of audit(s).

The auditors are required to be aware of the risks and opportunities of the information and communication



technologies used and the impacts that they may have on the validity and objectivity of the information gathered. If ICT is used for audit purposes, it contributes to the total audit time determined using IAF MD 5 and in accordance with the specific management system for which audit is conducted, as additional planning may be necessary which may impact audit duration.

- l) TQ Cert's audit reports and related records indicate the extent to which ICT has been used in carrying out audit and the effectiveness of ICT in achieving the audit objectives.
- m) If virtual sites are included within the scope, then the TQ Cert's certification documentation identify the virtual sites that are included and the activities performed at the virtual sites.

5. Additional audit time determination

In determination of additional audit time required for the application of ICT, TQ Cert identify the complexities involved in conducting remote audits, which are not limited to the identification of time zones of the sites and language involved (for use of translators), complexities of scope involved (for use of experts) etc., in all cases, the minimum audit time shall be 01-man day in addition to the audit time determined or 30 % of the audit time determined using IAF MD 5.

6. Applying ICT / Remote Audit

- a) TQ Cert upon receipt of remote audit consent form from its clients, conducts the review of remote audit request.
- b) In some cases, TQ Cert decides to carry out remote audit on its own, depending upon the nature of the circumstances or as a certification or accreditation requirement.
- c) The audit and scope complexities such as use of technology, expert, translator, time zone difference are determined by TQ Cert and the additional time required for remote audit for use of ICT shall be determined after review and will be informed to client.
- d) The specific dates & time period to perform a remote audit will be decided by TQ Cert. The duration of a remote assessment may differ from that of onsite audit, depending on what aspects are planned to be covered. In addition, it is also likely that the assessment may be fragmented with individual activities happening over the course of a longer period.
- e) The mode of communication and the IT platform between TQ Cert audit team and client organization for conducting remote audit, sending documents or clarification on issues shall be pre-defined and communicated and are agreed as part of remote audit consent form.
- f) The client organization must provide to TQ Cert the names of the designated individual(s) that will facilitate, manage and coordinate arrangements for the remote audit on behalf of the client organization.
- g) TQ Cert's normal certification procedure is applied.
- h) The audit team are appointed and audit details are communicated to clients as per normal onsite audit procedures.
- i) The key personnel including the top management of the client organization are required to be present throughout the audit.
- j) TQ Cert shall ensure the impartiality of the remote audit being conducted and to safeguard confidentiality of the electronically shared client's data/ information in any form.
- k) Both TQ Cert remote audit team and the client organization should make their best efforts to confirm what was heard, stated and read throughout the remote audit. In case if the remote audit team is not able to review,



in part or in full, any specific activity, a record shall be made.

- l) At any case, when the remote audit is cancelled or when ICT is not being utilized by the client or TQ cert auditors, the same shall be notified to Head of Certification and a record shall be made with appropriate justification.
- m) If at any time during the remote audit process, the client organization cannot support the remote audit process or the assessor(s) cannot perform the assessment sufficiently using the remote audit approach then the client organization must have an onsite audit for those functions that could not be assessed using remote audit.
- n) The remote audit team in consultation with TQ Cert may terminate the remote audit prior to completion due to an inability to maintain satisfactory connections or conditions during the scheduled time. This shall be recorded in the audit report by TQ Cert auditor conducting remote audit.
- o) Upon completion of remote audit, the audit report shall be sent to the client as per TQ Cert audit procedure and it shall include the details of remote audit – the method and mode of audit, auditee details, processes being covered in remote audit, additional requirement or follow up required for onsite etc. and a formal audit conclusion.
- p) the application review shall include a check that the client and the audit/assessment body have the necessary infrastructure to support the use of the ICT proposed.
- q) the audit/assessment plan shall identify how ICT will be utilized and the extent to which ICT will be used for audit/assessment purposes to optimize audit/assessment effectiveness and efficiency while maintaining the integrity of the audit/assessment process

7. Post Remote Assessment Activities

- a) Audit findings (Non-conformances, concerns etc.) shall be documented by the remote audit team and provided to the client organization in writing in a timely manner at the closure of Remote Assessment or just thereafter.
- b) The remote audit team shall debrief the client organization on the audit findings at the end
- c) of each day and in the Closing Meeting of the remote audit.
- d) The audit report shall be provided by the remote audit team in the prescribed time period as per TQ Cert certification and following NABCB accreditation procedure and shall include the details of the standards/requirements, or part thereof, for which compliance is audited and findings, documents and records reviewed, and details on client organizational scope for which audit is conducted.
- e) The treatment of Non-conformances and/or Concerns, if raised, and renewing/continuing approval of accreditation shall follow the same processes that are prescribed for on-site audits as per TQ Cert's certification procedure.
- f) Data captured during audit is recorded and stored in TQCert server with restricted access for future reference.
- g) The Remote Audit team shall confirm to TQ Cert, the deletion of any confidential documents, records, recordings etc. of the client organization, as available with it during the remote audit, on completion of the process.

8. Records

- 1. **Form 1 – Risk Assessment for conduct of remote audit for Certification/ Surveillance**



TQ Cert Services Private Limited
(formerly Food Cert India Private Limited)

PROCEDURE NO. : **QMS-P28**

**INFORMATION EXCHANGE and PROCESSING THE
APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATION**

REV.NO.01

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