



## AUDITING vs POLICING

If your company operates on the principle that safety audits are carried out by Safety Professionals for the purpose of policing non-compliance to “The Rules and Standards”, then read on.

### AUDIT

*An inspection, correction and verification of business accounts by a qualified accountant or a thorough examination or check.*

The safety fraternity has adopted this practice from the accounting profession for good reason – inspecting, examining, checking and verifying of safety systems, procedures and equipment are all necessary. Sadly, the **correction** aspect is seldom seen as an **improvement tool**, and the safety audit, rather than being a *means* to an end, is merely the end itself.

So **how** do you facilitate a **mindset shift** from “*This safety audit is a necessary evil of policing, inflicted by some external source (the Safety Professionals)*” to “*This safety audit is a powerful self-improvement tool*” ?

1. Invest the time necessary to make sure everyone understands the **fundamental purpose** (in its entirety) for continuous safety audits, viz.

**To ensure that safety is in place  
and  
to find opportunities for going  
way beyond ‘compliance’  
on an ongoing basis.**

2. Make safety auditing an **on-going line responsibility** (same as you do with output, costs, quality, etc.).
3. The systems, rules and regulations, standards and procedures should not only be “in place” and working, but also be **accepted and understood** by all, so as to foster an **ownership mentality**.
4. Auditing of plant and equipment, safety mechanisms, fire fighting, first aid, emergency equipment, interlocks, trips and alarms, instruments and other safety critical devices with a “**look to see**” **mindset** will highlight aspects that could be improved on.
5. Make sure that the inspection, examination, verification and reporting aspect of a safety audit is **not used as an excuse** for “not having time” to workshop and implement improvements.

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## ACTION

1. Issue each auditor with a set of 2 red and 4 green cards. Red to **stop** an unsafe practice / operation and green to **recognise** people who are doing the right or safe thing. This will force the auditors to look for the GOOD things and find safety champions to recognise.
2. Schedule time to **coach** line people to do **self-audits**. (This investment in time will save you plenty of time in the long run.) Then, at the annual Safety Day, **recognise** and **reward** those who self-audit well, instead of just those with the best metrics.



3. Get the auditors to wear hats / badges, depicting the **focus area** which they will be looking at. This gives **high visibility** and at the same time ensures that each auditor is concentrating on one specific aspect of safety.



4. Although I am against paperwork, consider drawing up an **AUDIT PREPARATION CHECK LIST**: What to do and have ready for an effective audit. Provide **training** for the 'hosts', as well as your team leaders and safety reps, on how to enable an audit.
5. Give **feedback** on the audit findings to the '**players**' who "push the buttons and use the tools", not only to the '**coaches**' = managers. The players have just as much a role to play in the safety 'game'!

## MORE TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE AUDITS

Safety audits are a schlep for many 'auditors', because there is a lack of preparation and the mind-set of people is wrong and thus the audits end up having a 'policing' flavour. The best audits go way beyond checking for compliance to focusing on finding opportunities for safety improvement. A climate of openness and transparency is essential if you want audits to be effective. The people who own and run the operation will know best "the good, bad and ugly", but they will not share this if they feel threatened.



1. The audit process should focus at being pro-active rather than re-active. It should aim at pointing out the good and not only the observations (mainly bad), as well influence people's attitude and thus their behaviour.
2. One key element to be presented and reviewed is the SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PLAN for each plant! You want to see that the plant people know their safety issues and are actively working on PREVENTION - not waiting for the next thing to happen.
3. Another critical element in Good Practice is the issue of CLOSING OUT. To this end previous audit findings and agreed ACTIONS should be given to the audit team (in advance) as well as the list of recent corrective actions, both completed and still open.

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This is a clear measure of how much real safety improvement efforts and total involvement by all is taking place.

4. One of the benefits of an external audit is that it 'forces' the host to do a self-audit in preparation for the external audit. This in itself leads to better understanding of what is required and where the gaps are.
5. In a well-planned audit all the required 'evidence' and preparations are ready and laid out for inspection - a piece of cake after the self-audit. These include things like:
  - a. All safety documents and key indicators
  - b. Safety minutes, toolbox talks, PPE records, poster rotation program, etc.
  - c. Training records
  - d. Other documents like appointments, risk assessments, etc.
  - e. Keys for stores, cupboards, offices, etc.
  - f. Clip board, coat and shoes
  - g. A 2-5 minute safety induction for that specific plant
6. It goes without saying that the safety manager, supervisor / team leader and safety rep. are part of the audit team, as this is a most valuable coaching / learning opportunity. In fact, they should actively be taking their own notes and recording actions right there and then, something they should in any event be doing when they walk the plant on their own.
7. Auditing is one of the golden opportunities for leaders to 'Walk Their Talk'. To visibly demonstrate the values and to drive safety by hunting for opportunities to recognise safety champions and to find pockets of excellence to share with the rest of the company. Part of this opportunity is sharing with employees **WHY** safety is important.
8. Apart from looking and checking, auditors should ASK and listen. Ask those people 'who push the buttons and use the tools' why they are doing what they are doing, why they are breaking the rules / taking short cuts / not using check lists and procedures, etc. And most importantly what can be done to make the work easier and safer for them. Give people "Einspruchsrecht" – the right to partake in decisions which affect them!
9. The TOP FIVE or TEN audit findings (major issues) should be identified, highlighted and ACTIONS agreed right there and then at the main feedback forum - What, Who and When! These issues are of such a nature that they deserve real SERIOUS attention, NOW!
10. Have a look at my **Series**: [SAFETY ON A SHOESTRING BUDGET – The 10 P's](#)
  - a. Prevention
  - b. Purpose
  - c. Preparation
  - d. People
  - e. Problems
  - f. Pat-on-the-back
  - g. Plan
  - h. Progress
  - i. Pen-to-paper
  - j. Pro-Active Action

## RELATED LINKS

[COOL TOOL™ TOOLBOX TALKS](#) – Topic: Checklists, Inspections and Audits