



# Safer Ports Initiative Guide to Health and Safety Audits

## 1. Safer Ports Initiative

This document is one of a series produced in accordance with the aims and objectives of the Safer Ports Initiative (SPI) and provides a guide to good practice on the use of health and safety audits (Audits). The SPI sets demanding targets for the reduction of accidents in the ports industry. To achieve those targets all employers in the ports industry will need to contribute by ensuring the implementation of effective health and safety management systems within their organisations. An essential part of any successful health and safety management system is the process of Audits.

## 2. Introduction

Broad guidance on the merits and features of Audits is given by the Health and Safety Executive in its publication, "Successful Health and Safety Management - HS(G) 65"<sup>1</sup>. Some of the points covered in this guidance are re-produced below as they are the most definitive good practice.

HSE's definition of an Audit in this guidance document is as follows:

'The structured process of collecting independent information on the efficiency, effectiveness and reliability of the total health and safety management system and drawing up plans for corrective action'.

Auditing is seen as an essential element of any health and safety management system but it should not be seen as a substitute for other essential parts of the system.

## 3. Audit as a Measuring Tool

Within a port, a properly devised Audit carried out by an independent competent person can provide a very useful check on the effectiveness of the employer's policies and procedures. It can assess an employer's arrangements to comply with sections 2 to 6 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and thus assist an employer to meet his obligations towards his employees and others.

It can provide feedback on the risk management strategies to enable an employer to continue to refine any controls in place. Positively, an Audit can also be seen as an encouragement and morale builder for staff, as it will provide independent verification and confirmation of the effort they put in to make the system work.

<sup>1</sup> Successful Health and Safety Management, HS(G), 65, ISBN 0 7176 12767

#### 4. Features of an Effective Audit

The HS(G) 65 guidance states that the aim of auditing should be to establish that:

- Appropriate management arrangements are in place
- Adequate risk control systems exist, are implemented and consistent with the hazard profile of the organisation
- Appropriate workplace precautions are in place

An organisation can meet the above aims in different ways. Some organisations choose to use quantitative analyses or a scoring system to assess performances so as to have a historical comparison. In other workplaces a qualitative approach has been used. Both can be effective providing they are applied rigorously and objectively. Both can be useful in developing or mapping out a comprehensive picture of the port's health and safety management system.

There are industry standards and good practice established through organisations such as Port Skills and Safety (PSS) and the HSE. When undertaking an audit of an employer's health and safety management system, it is important to gather information to check it against the established good practice. An auditor should do this by having a thorough knowledge of the good practice standards and by sampling. In this sampling exercise, an auditor should:

- Interview individuals
- Examine documents
- Carry out visual observations

The auditor should evaluate the information gathered, to form a judgement as to whether the employer's health and safety systems meet the HSE's and the Industry's good practice, as well as the employer's own policies and benchmarks. The results should be discussed openly with the employer before providing a written report of the findings and making suggestions or putting forward recommendations for improvement.

The organisation should exercise control over the Audit process to ensure that it is applied rigorously and consistently. They should also ensure the validity and the quality of the information being given to the auditor by staff. HS(G) 65 suggests the following controls:

- Ensure that the audit is perceived as a positive management tool and is taken seriously by all levels of management.
- Ensure that the system is applied in accordance with its intended use. Using the system for other than its designed purpose may reduce the return on the investment in auditing. Stricter controls may be necessary where number scoring systems are used. Inconsistent application may invalidate the potential for comparison.
- Secure the competence of auditors. All systems to a varying degree rely on the competence of the auditors. Specific standards of training are invaluable to ensure consistency of method and interpretation.

- Secure the effective implementation of results and recommendations.

For an audit programme to be effective and successful, it is essential that the Audit results and recommendations, made by the auditor, be tracked to completion. This will require the port to have a further implementation plan or strategy with responsibilities and time-scales allocated for each one of the recommendations made by the auditor. Repeat Audits should be encouraged to verify implementation of the recommendations and to continuously assess the health and safety performance of the port.

## **5. Selecting Competent Auditors**

To maximise the benefits of an Audit, competent people independent of the area or activities being audited should conduct it. This can either be achieved in-house using staff from different sections from within the organisation or by bringing in outside experts. Whatever route is followed, the auditors selected must have knowledge and experience of the type of activity being audited.

In addition they must have sound knowledge of health and safety legislation in the area under audit, HSE/HSC Codes of Practice and Guidance, as well as Industry guidance and good practice standards. A member of an accredited body for health & safety professionals should have sufficient technical knowledge to satisfy most of the criteria relating to competence. However, professionals and experts in other fields, relevant to the area being audited, could also satisfy the competence criteria as assessed by the port when selecting the auditor.

**A safe port is underpinned by an established Audit regime**

**Notes:**

1. The Safer Ports Initiative (SPI) was developed and implemented to reduce the number of accidents that occur each year in the ports industry.
2. The SPI complements the government's initiative outlined in its Revitalising Health and Safety Strategy Statement published in June 2000.
3. The accident reduction targets, twice the level recommended in the Revitalising Health and Safety Strategy Statement, are:
  - *to reduce the incidence rate of reportable fatal and major injury accidents by 10% by the end of 2005*
  - *to reduce the incidence rate of all other reportable over 3 day accidents by 20% by the end of 2005*
4. Further information is available from:  
  
Port Skills and Safety  
Carthusian Court  
12 Carthusian Street  
London EC1M 6EZ  
Telephone: 020 7260 1790  
Fax: 020 7260 1795  
Email: [info@portskillsandsafety.co.uk](mailto:info@portskillsandsafety.co.uk)
5. PSS was established by the ports industry at the end of 2001 to carry forward its combined national work on health, safety, skills and standards. PSS is a non-profit making organisation and provides the ports industry with a full range of services including representation to Government and other national European and international bodies, practical advice and information through regular newsletters and information papers, training events, guidance publications, National Occupational Standards and Vocational Qualifications. PSS is funded by subscriptions and is open to all port related organisations.

For further information on subscribing to PSS, telephone: 020 7260 1795



*This guide has been developed by the SPI Special Work Group and published by Port Skills and Safety (PSS) on its behalf.*