



# CHRIS JONES RISK MANAGEMENT

## OHS Auditing – A Measure of Success

By Chris Jones

Chris Jones Risk Management

A company owner recently asked me how he could ensure that his company's Occupational Health and Safety programme was complying with legislation, and was meeting current standards and customer requirements. His recent quotes for a supply and installation job with a major builder were rejected because of inadequate safety documentation, and he was keen to get his safety programme up to the expectations of this potential customer.



One of the things I suggested as a good starting place was to have an audit conducted of the company's safety management systems, by a competent, experienced consultant.

For a larger company, a regular auditing programme is an excellent way of keeping senior management apprised of the performance of individual branches or divisions, before there is a serious accident or statistics run wild.

### External Audits

Audits can be categorised as external or internal.

An external audit is conducted by someone who has no day to day involvement in the organisation being audited. The auditor may be an external consultant, but, in the case of a larger organisation, could be someone from (say) head office or another part of the company.

External audits are usually conducted against an agreed standard or specification. This may be a very formal specification, such as the Australian Standard on OHS management systems, AS 4801, or against a best practice standard unique to the auditing organisation.

Advantages of an external audit include:

- It is reviewing the OHS management system against current standards and practices;
- It is being conducted by someone not bound up in the day-to-day running of the business, who can give an independent, unbiased report;
- It establishes a baseline against which improvement can be measured;
- It can be used to provide verification to third parties that there is an effective OHS programme in place.

External audits are not without shortcomings. The auditor is highly unlikely to have in-depth knowledge of your company or even your unique segment of your industry. Even with such knowledge, the auditor is only able to verify that systems and procedures are in place. It will be very difficult for the auditor to assess the quality of the decisions being made and the effectiveness of the controls implemented.

### Internal Audits

Ideally, an auditing programme includes both external and internal audits.

Internal audits are conducted by in-house staff. Rather than reviewing the management systems and procedures, the auditor is verifying that the established programme is actually being implemented. Additionally, the auditor can confirm that the procedures and systems are being implemented when and where required. The internal auditor is far more likely to be able to make



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an assessment of the quality of the implementation, than an outsider.

Internal auditors can spend more time conducting audits of specified elements of the programme, and can audit with a more flexible time-table.

An external audit is reviewing your OHS programme against agreed, current standards. It answers the question, “Do we have a good safety programme? What should we be doing?”



In contrast, internal audits are focussing on ensuring that your established OHS programme is being implemented properly and in full. An internal audit answers the question, “Are we actually doing what our own safety procedures say we do? Are we doing it properly?”

When both external and internal audits are conducted, their effectiveness is multiplied.

**Chris Jones Risk Management provides a wide range of Occupational Health and Safety services and training, including:**

- ✓ OHS Audits – SafetyPlan; SafetyPlan Gold; AS 4801
- ✓ OHS programme implementation
- ✓ Risk Assessments
- ✓ OHS culture surveys
- ✓ Accredited training for construction induction and consultation (NSW)
- ✓ OHS training for management and supervisors

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