

April 2017

Safety Audits and Inspections

WEB VERSION

Occupational Health and Safety Service
HSD112M (rev4)



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Safety Management Audits:

Formerly called a vertical safety audit, the safety management audit is a formal review of the systems in place within your department/institution/college etc. which ensure safety in the workplace and activities associated with university and college life.

Trained safety auditors from the Occupational Health and Safety Service (OHSS) visit the department/college etc. and conduct interviews with selected staff and sometimes students to verify how well safety management systems work in practice. Selected documents relating to safety are viewed, for example, policy and risk assessments. Short sample inspections of some parts of the department/college are also carried out.

It is not a comprehensive inspection designed to find all faults, or all good practice for that matter. The focus is primarily on evidence that safety is being effectively managed in a proactive manner and is in compliance with health and safety law and university/college policy.

A full cycle of management audits was completed for university departments and a new cycle started in 2012. Information about these audits is added to the OHSS website as it becomes available.

Subject Specific Audits:

Formerly called an horizontal safety audit, these audits concentrate on a specific subject or topic area, for example, biological safety, chemical safety, chemical waste, pressurised gas safety, electrical safety, work-related upper limb disorders (WRULD), noise, vibration, radioactivity and laser safety. Safety management of a specific hazard is reviewed by an 'audit team' led and managed by a designated subject specialist from the Safety Office. Interviews, examination of paperwork and inspections are part of the audit process. Audit question sets can be found on the Safety Office web site for some of these subjects

After an audit

Following either type of audit the Safety Office usually produces a report, and the draft is given to the department to check for factual accuracy such as peoples' names, room numbers etc. An action plan is then drawn up, usually by the department, although in the past this task has sometimes been carried out for departments by the Safety Office. Progress against action plans is monitored and reported to the University Health and Safety Executive Committee (HSEC) via the Consultative Committee for Safety (CCFS) and its sub-committees (see HSD107M and HSD109M).

Inspections:

An inspection is a practical look at some aspects of safety in your department. It may be **general**, such as a visit to a particular laboratory or office, or it may be very **specific**, such as checking whether all chemicals are stored properly in your department. Departments should already engage in **safety tours** or **safety 'walkabouts'**— these are essentially the same as inspections, but should form part of a planned schedule to ensure the whole of the department is 'inspected' **at least yearly**. Departmental inspections can be general or subject specific (frequently following concerns or evidence of the potential need for improvement).

Who runs an Inspection?

It may be initiated by a member of the Safety Office, or by your local staff, for example, the Departmental Safety Officer, by Trade Union Representatives, or by an external authority such as the UK government's Health and Safety Executive (HSE). If it is the latter, please make sure the Safety Office knows as we can help with the visit in a number of ways.

A report will usually be issued, and this should be available to the local safety committee, discussed, and action taken to address any problem areas to an agreed time frame.

Other types of inspection:

'The Unannounced Visit'

You may receive an unannounced visit from a member of the Safety Office staff. The member of staff will, however, always check in at Reception, will ask that the Departmental Administrator and/or the Departmental Safety Officer as appropriate be told, and will agree to be accompanied if required. The purpose of such visits is **not to catch you out**, but to make occasional reassurance checks.

Most departments welcome these visits and you will always be treated courteously.

'HSE Visits'

The UK government's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) can and have the legal right to, conduct inspections at any time they feel is reasonable. This is not a common event in the University, but it could occur following their concern over a specific incident or about a very specific hazard. In the latter case a specialist inspector may call. In all cases where the HSE are involved, the Department should strictly follow their standard procedures at reception, noting the name of the Inspector and where they are from, (they carry a 'warrant card') before contacting the **HoD, DSO, administrator and the Safety Office**.

Remember:

The University is legally obliged to fully cooperate with the HSE and their inspectors, be polite and answer any and all questions put to you by the Inspector.

However 'unannounced' HSE visits are very rare, an HSE visit would usually be by prearrangement with the Safety Office.

If you are directly contacted by the HSE let the Safety Office know immediately, so that we can support you.

Need to know more?

Sign up for training events such as:

'Inspecting Your Workplace' or 'Being an Effective Departmental Safety Officer'.

Make sure the Safety Office knows when your Departmental Safety Committee Meetings are. We attend most of the Committees to which we are invited, and can help explain audits and inspections.

For more information see the web site below:

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