

Insight aims to provide useful information, links and tips in the areas of Risk Management, Work Health and Safety, Business Continuity Management, and other areas relating to management systems and corporate governance.

Safety auditing and professional judgement

The current version of the ISO 19011 *Guidelines for auditing management systems* includes the points that "Auditors should apply professional judgement during the audit process" followed by "Where the degree of verification is low the auditor should use their professional judgement to determine the degree of reliance that can be placed on it as evidence".

A degree of 'professional scepticism' underpins the exercise of the professional judgement. Auditors should be automatically sceptical and ask themselves, 'Am I getting the full picture? Have these audit responses been choreographed?', and is there any evidence to support the comments?'

To achieve confidence in the auditee's compliance status, there is a need to review the presented documentary evidence (whether that be in procedures, completed forms or an IT system) and 'pressure-test' this verbally across a number of the work-teams and/or observe it in action.

With virtual auditing, the exercise of professional judgement is even more critical. The professional experience of the auditor comes to the fore during the virtual site tour to achieve the 'observe it in action' component. By working through a pre-established list of what is expected to be seen whilst virtually 'walking through' the site, the auditor can cross-check what's shown against what should be present. For example, when auditing a warehouse area, the auditor will be looking to see the following:

- A mechanically sound forklift with a completed pre-use inspection form
- Speed limit signage and operators driving safely within the limits
- Hi-vis being worn and pedestrian movement on the designated walkways
- Sturdy pallets that are shrink-wrapped or restrained when they are stored at height
- Structurally sound pallet racking, with SWL signage and collision guards in place



- Appropriate levels of housekeeping being maintained
- Emergency access clear

QRMC's experience with the virtual audit process suggests that there is often a need to double-back on evidence to dispel the professional scepticism and to make sure everything the auditee claims to be done, is actually done.

While there is some leeway when applying professional judgement, the site tour component of a virtual audit needs to provide sufficient evidence to justify the auditor's confidence that the audit criteria have been addressed.

QRMC can provide advice on effective management and logistics for virtual auditing. Please [contact us](#) for more information.

Why do we look in the rear-view mirror so much?

When it comes to safety performance why do organisations persist in focusing mostly on what they have done and where they have gone wrong? There is so much energy spent reporting on, analysing and sometimes even 'fudging' lagging incident data that paying the necessary attention to leading indicators often misses out.



Safety incident data are used for multiple purposes. Externally, tenders are often won and lost, and internally, bonuses are frequently paid all on the basis of safety incident data. But a focus on lagging data for these and other purposes is simply looking in the rear-view mirror at the organisation's 'history'. It is reacting after the fact. This is akin to a rugby team focussing post-match only on the tries scored against them, instead of looking at the game as a whole and the stats that will improve team performance, such as metres gained, balls to hand and the obvious one in tries scored.

While industry isn't going to change safety reporting habits overnight, many organisations are realising substantial benefits by focusing more on their lead indicators when reviewing performance, and de-emphasising their KPIs relating to lagging incident data.

Leading indicators are proactive and represent the positive steps an organisation can take to improve their safety performance.

There is a range of leading indicators that can be considered, from the more commonly used training compliance percentages, to audit outcomes and inspection completions, to detailed dashboards reflecting the risks based on their ratings.

These leading KPIs work best where there is a direct connection to the overarching WHS objectives, for example:

- If there is an objective to enhance WHS knowledge and understanding, then a proactive KPI could link to WHS training completion statistics.
- If there is an objective to improve safety ownership and accountability, worker-led participation and consultation could be measured.
- If there is an objective relating to the management of workplace risks, this can be considered in terms of hazards identified via the various site processes, through to the risks being assessed and the controls implemented.

Ironically, company Boards and Executive Management still seem to be focussed on the negative lagging indicators like LTIFR & TRIFR, as opposed to the information that they really need to see in order to ensure that they are fulfilling their positive due diligence requirements. This mismatch definitely presents an opportunity for positive change.

Please [contact QRMC](#) for more information.