Certification, recertification, and surveillance audits — What’s the difference?
By Kelly Huckabone

A certification audit occurs when a company undergoes an audit by an ISO Registrar to ensure compliance of all elements of a specific standard. An ISO certificate references the scope of the registration issued to the company and includes a three-year expiration date. Certification audits are most often broken into two stages. A stage one audit is typically conducted remotely to determine if the organization is ready for a stage two audit. If the auditor determines the company has met the minimum criteria for the stage one audit, the company will proceed with an onsite stage 2 audit, which is much more in-depth and includes a document review, interviews, and work observances covering all elements of the standard.

Every year, a surveillance audit is conducted by the ISO Registrar. A surveillance audit is less intensive than the certification audit. It is a “snapshot” in time of the auditor’s review to ensure the company is still meeting the key elements of the ISO standard. However, sometimes not every element will be reviewed during a surveillance audit. If there are any gaps, a nonconformance finding is documented and the company is responsible for addressing it to ensure ongoing certification.

A recertification audit occurs every three years from when the original certification audit was completed. During a three-year period, there are typically numerous organizational changes that happen within a company. Part of the recertification audit is to ensure that the Quality Management System (QMS) has assessed and documented these changes appropriately and implemented any necessary training. Another reason for a recertification audit is to ensure companies incorporate changes to their QMS when ISO standards are updated.

Whether your company is undergoing a certification, recertification, or surveillance audit, it is good practice and a company’s responsibility to always be “audit ready.” Next month’s article will offer some important tips for ensuring audit readiness.

About the Author

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