

Information sheet on the certification of organisations with multiple sites / legal entit

This guidance note is based on the information contained in IAF document MD 1:2023 and describes how organisations with multiple sites or comprising several legal entities can undergo joint certification.

The regulations described below apply only to procedures in accordance with ISO 17021. The validation of environmental statements and the certification of environmental management systems based on our DAU accreditation are subject to specific provisions, about which we will be happy to provide information on request.

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1 Applicability of the multi-site procedure

If an organisation has several sites at which a uniform management system is applied for the entire organisation under the direction of a central office, certification of the entire organisation may be carried out in a single procedure. Within the organisation, sites with similar activities may be certified on the basis of a random assessment of the sites (see 5).

The following requirements must be met for multi-site certification:

- a) There is a defined central office of the organisation that manages and controls the entire organisation. Regarding the management system, this includes at least the following activities:
 - Documentation of the management system
 - Changes to the management system
 - Complaints management
 - Corrective actions
 - Internal audits and management review
 - Monitoring of compliance with relevant external regulations
- b) Different companies belonging to the organisation may be based at the individual sites. If several companies within an organisation are to be certified, the requirements listed under 3 must also be met
- c) Access to the individual sites must be ensured

Criteria for uniform organisations are:

- Powers of top management
 - Reporting obligations of subordinate units
 - Delegation of responsibility
 - Selection of personnel
 - Provision of resources
 - Binding definition of policy and objectives
 - This may not necessarily be the case even within group structures
- Scope of activities of central office and sites
 - Uniform business purpose of the entire organisation
 - Central office controls service delivery at the sites globally (e.g. via business policy and the management system)

Upon successful completion of the procedure, all sites involved will be listed in an annex to the certificate. It is also possible to issue a sub-certificate for each site; additional costs may be charged for this in accordance with the offer.

2 Definition of a site

A **site** comprises processes/activities under the control of an organisation that are carried out at a defined physical location, including all associated or related storage of raw materials, by-products, intermediate products, finished products and waste materials, as well as all equipment or infrastructure involved in the processes/activities, regardless of whether these are temporary or not.

Alternatively, legally prescribed definitions apply where available.

The geographical extent of a site is not necessarily limited to a (postal) address. Depending on the nature of the products or services, a larger area may also be regarded as an organisation's site.

Sites may be either permanent or temporary – depending on the intended duration of use for the organisation's manufacture of products or provision of services.

A **temporary site** refers to a site where specific activities are carried out for a limited period. The client determines which sites are to be designated as temporary. However, these must also be audited on a random basis as part of the certification process. Temporary sites may also be listed on the certificate but must be marked as temporary.

If processes – irrespective of a physical location – are carried out using an online environment, this constitutes a **virtual site**. However, processes that must be carried out in a physical environment (e.g. warehousing, physical testing laboratories) cannot be regarded as virtual sites. When calculating audit time, virtual sites are treated in the same way as individual sites.

Consumption points are energy consumption points located outside of sites. They are connected to the network operator's grid via one or more connection points and have their own energy meters. They are therefore not separate sites within the meaning of IAF-MD1.

3 Joint certification of multiple companies

If an organisation comprises multiple companies (legal entities or partnerships) and wishes to have them certified under a joint procedure, it must be ensured that the management headquarters has the authority to exercise control over the implementation of the tasks in accordance with Section 1c).

This can be demonstrated by

- a legally binding agreement between the participating entities, provided that they pursue a unified business purpose and jointly offer a service or product line to customers, or
- a controlling relationship in the sense of a group structure in accordance with Section 271 in conjunction with Section 290 of the German Commercial Code (HGB).

Furthermore, if the activities at the sites are of a similar nature, the overall management system may be certified based on a random assessment of the sites.

3.1 For which organisational structures is joint certification not permitted?

An overall organisation that brings together independent individual organisations solely for the purpose of operating or certifying a uniform management system cannot be certified through a sample audit. Franchise companies are generally not eligible for multi-site certification.

3.2 Verification of the requirements for joint certification

When requesting an offer, the organisation must provide credible evidence that the requirements set out in section 3 are met. The offer is then calculated on the basis of the information provided.

If the organisation subsequently submits an application for certification, suitable evidence must be provided to the certification body, based on which the body will then decide whether to approve the application.

4 What further requirements must be met?

Prior to the initial certification audit, the full internal audit must have been completed at all sites and the management review carried out. The certification contract is concluded with the parent company.

5 Application of the sampling procedure

For the auditing of an organisation with multiple sites, a sampling procedure may be applied under certain conditions (see 1 and 3). In addition to the aspects listed below, when drawing up the audit programme, care must generally be taken to ensure that an effective audit is carried out, whereby the audit objectives are achieved with sufficient certainty and existing risks are appropriately considered.

In this case, only selected sites, in addition to the central office, are included in the audit. The selection of the sites to be audited is the responsibility of the certification body. A random selection procedure must also be applied. This often results in significant cost advantages compared to separate certification of the individual sites. When applying the sampling procedure, the following requirements must also be observed:

General

- The products/services provided at all sites must be essentially of the same nature and, in principle, manufactured using the same methods and procedures.
- External requirements (e.g. laws), the implementation of which is to be assessed in the audit, are the same (or largely similar) at all sites.

EMS

- All sites have similar, comparable environmental impacts.

EnMS

- In addition to the sites, all of the company's delivery points must also be included in the certification process. The certification body selects the delivery points to be audited in consultation with the appointed auditor.
- EnMS procedure in accordance with ISO 50003: The processes relating to significant energy use and significant energy consumption must be essentially same at all sites organised into similar sub-units operated using similar methods or processes. Sites with the most energy-intensive processes must be subject to more frequent audits.

Additional tasks for the EnMS central office:

- Energy planning process
- Determination and adjustment of the baseline and energy performance indicators
- Establishment of objectives, targets and action plans
- Evaluation of the applicability and effectiveness of action plans and EnPIs
- Data on organisation-wide energy-related performance

OHSMS

- Accident and health risks to employees at work must not differ significantly across all sites and must be assignable to the same risk class.
- If additional accident and health risks exist at sites that result in classification into a higher risk class, these sites must be excluded from the sampling procedure and audited separately.

AZAV

- In these procedures, the sampling procedure is only applicable within a single legal entity

ISMS

- The sampling procedure can only be applied to sites where no increased risk has been identified. High-risk sites must be audited every year.

AMS

- The following aspects must be considered when selecting a sample of assets:
 - Risk potential with significant financial implications
 - Impact on the intended outcomes (performance, planning, leadership, support)

The scope of the sample for the site audit is determined by the detailed provisions of MD1:2023, 6.1.3.3.

6 Inclusion of temporary sites

When including temporary sites in the sampling plan, their role within the management system must be considered.

If they differ only in terms of the period of use, they are treated in the same way as permanent sites (where applicable, as a separate cluster, see 7.2).

Where usage is of shorter duration or relevance within the management system is reduced (e.g. regarding the number of relevant processes), both the number of temporary sites included and the audit time allocated to each may be less than that for permanent sites. In doing so, the existing risks and the effectiveness of the audit must be considered as determining factors. For OHSMS procedures, different project statuses should also be considered in the sample.

7 Adjustment of the sample size

7.1 Consideration of additional risks

When determining the sample size, additional factors that pose risks to the effectiveness of the audit are considered:

- Size of the sites and number of employees
- Complexity and risk level of processes/activities
- Complaints and other aspects relating to corrective and preventive actions
- Results of internal audits and management reviews

7.2 Clustering of sites

If the conditions specified under 5 apply only to some of the sites, adjustments to the sample size are possible. Sites can thus be divided into different clusters, for each of which the above-mentioned requirements are then met. The sample selection is then carried out separately for each cluster.

7.3 Inclusion of new sites

If new sites are to be included in an existing multi-site certificate, the certification body shall adjust the audit programme in consultation with the audit leader. In doing so, the aspects mentioned in this document must be considered when determining the new sample size. As a rule, at least one new site must be included in the sample; any decision to the contrary must be justified.

7.4 Multi-site certification without sampling

If sampling is not possible, all sites are audited in initial and recertification audits.

In surveillance audits, 30 % of the relevant sites in addition to the central office are audited (rounded up to the nearest whole number). All sites to be included in the matrix during the year must be audited individually.

This procedure may also be applied to individual clusters (see 7.2) where the requirements set out in 5 are not met.

8 Calculation of audit time

The audit time per site is calculated in accordance with IAF MD 5 or the regulations specifically defined for the management system. The further requirements of IAF MD 1, 7.3 are considered.

When determining the site-specific audit time, priority must also be given to the effectiveness of the audit. To this end, the transfer of audit time between different sites may also be considered where appropriate. In special cases, audit time at sites may even be further reduced based on a risk analysis. Decisions in this regard must be justified and documented in detail.

9 Prerequisites for obtaining certification

A prerequisite for certification is the fulfilment of all standard requirements at all sites involved.

The certificate must be suspended, restricted or withdrawn for the entire organisation if even one of the included sites fails to meet the certification requirements. Furthermore, the impact of a finding on other sites must be assessed in the audit matrix and appropriate cross-site measures initiated.

An organisation may also include only some of its sites in the management system; these are then subject to the procedure described. Any change to the included sites must be communicated to the certification body in good time prior to an audit. It is not possible to exclude sites (which may not meet the requirements for certification) whilst the process is ongoing.

The certification body must be notified immediately if sites are removed from the scope of the certified management system.

Detailed information on the sites is required to prepare a offer for sample certification. The list must include, for each site, at least the address, activities, service profile and the number of employees; where applicable, separate system-specific details must be added. The certification body uses this information to draw up an audit programme for the entire certification period. The information regarding the sites and the overall system is verified by the auditor during the audit. Incorrect information may result in significant additional work or the termination of the certification process.