



Policy on assessment and surveillance in special situations

A Preamble

1 Introduction and purpose of the policy

When conditions are considered dangerous, inappropriate or not possible for some reason for an IOAS assessor to carry out a visit, it may be necessary to postpone it, re-schedule, perform a remote/virtual assessment or conduct desk review of documentation according to the case, in order to partially or fully comply with scheme requirements.

The purpose of this policy is to define the criteria for making this decision and the resulting implications for both the IOAS operation and the accreditation of the affected certification body (CB). This is not related to exceptions requested by the Certification Bodies (CBs) which is covered by PL0522.

2 Scope

The policy is applicable in exceptional circumstances that may occur as a result of 'Force Majeure' type events, such as political unrest, outbreak of disease, extreme climatic conditions, travel restrictions, etc. that affect the ability of IOAS to perform as scheduled any visit type (assessment, re-assessment, annual surveillance and operator site visit) deemed necessary in line with the IOAS policies and procedures for the initial and continuing assessment or accreditation of a CB. Other relevant documents are:

- [PL0519](#) - Policy on termination of application (during assessment);
- [PL0522](#) - Policy on granting emergency exceptions;
- [PL0506](#) - Suspension policy;
- [WK0310](#) - Guidance on Conducting Remote assessments;
- IAF ID 3: 2011. IAF Informative Document for Management of Extraordinary Events or Circumstances Affecting ABs, CBs and Certified Organizations.

3 Definitions

General reference is made to the definitions provided in the IOAS General Operating Manual.

4 Access and distribution

This document is distributed to all CBs, IOAS Board of Directors (BoD) and Accreditation Committee (AC) annually. Staff are informed of changes as soon as they have been finalized. Interested parties may obtain a copy on request.

5 Authority and revision

This policy is approved by the IOAS Executive Director. It is the responsibility of the IOAS Executive Director (ED) to review the appropriateness of the policy from time to time. It may be revised when the need arises. Revisions must be approved by the IOAS ED. Its effectiveness in meeting the quality policy of the IOAS will be assessed during Internal Review and any measures for improvement notified to the ED and the BoD.

B Policy

1 Circumstances which may alter the nature of, or postpone a visit

Circumstances which might precipitate a decision to postpone, reschedule, change the nature or cancel an assessment or surveillance visit to a CB office and operator sites would include:

- Conditions of war or political unrest;
- Quarantine restrictions or other disease threats or outbreaks that would prevent or make access inadvisable/impossible. Imposed travel restrictions might apply to the assessor's home country, in transit countries or the country of destination;
- Natural disasters; and/or,
- Any other reasons where the relevant Foreign Office of the assessor's country advises against travel. Travel advisories may refer to specific regions of a country to be avoided and these shall be taken into account in making the decision;
- When these circumstances arise, preventing IOAS to visit the CB office, IOAS will conduct the visit remotely whenever possible in order to maintain the accreditation schedule.

2 Implications for the IOAS and the affected CB

In cases of **initial assessment**, the visit may be postponed for up to one year from the intended date without the expiry of the application, though the accreditation process will be stopped until the on-site assessment can be done. Accreditation shall not be granted until the visit and post visit procedures can be completed.

In cases of **re-assessment** the visit may be postponed for up to one year from the intended date after which the CB will be suspended. In extraordinary cases where the delay is such that the accreditation is likely to expire before necessary assessment procedures and reaccreditation decision, the accreditation certificate may be extended a further 6 months depending on the risk factors associated with the CB, and taking into account any scheme owner input or requirements. The decision to extend shall be taken by the IOAS ED.

In cases of **annual surveillance**, greater flexibility exists in terms of CB reporting and desk audits and these will be exploited to the full as described below.

Operator site visits (witness and review/verification audits) taking place as part of assessment, re-assessment or surveillance whether attached to CB office visits or separately remain an important part of competence assessment and all avenues to ensure the number, range and type of inspections meet scheme owner or IOAS requirements as described below.

In all the above cases, IOAS shall consider to what extent remote/virtual audits can replace or partially replace the normal on-site visits.

C Procedure

All decisions to postpone a visit will be taken by the Programme Manager (PM) in conjunction with the respective Client Manager (CM), assessor and the relevant CB. An assessor who feels uncomfortable going to any country or region for any reason shall not be forced to undertake that assignment. Such decisions will be reported to the IOAS ED.

1 Assessments

Any decision to postpone a visit will be formally communicated to the CB in writing informing them of the implications of a delay extending past one year. Remote/virtual audits shall not normally be considered justified for initial assessments but preliminary visits (as described in PL 0520) may be conducted remotely to help the process continue and ready the CB for the actual on-site assessment.

The CM will maintain contact with the CB and monitor travel advisories in order to reschedule the visit as soon as possible.

If the visit cannot be rescheduled within one year, the application will be terminated according to [PL0519](#) unless there is express allowance from the scheme owner.

2 Re-assessments

Any decision to postpone a visit will be formally communicated to the CB in writing informing them of the implications of a delay extending past one year. Remote audits may be considered to cover the CB office audit unless the CB is considered high risk. Attending virtual inspections that the CB is carrying out to operators may replace IOAS witness audit. This must be confirmed and accordingly registered by IOAS PM with the corresponding justification.

The CM will maintain contact with the CB and monitor travel advisories in order to reschedule the visit as soon as possible.

If a re-assessment is postponed, an extension to the accreditation certificate may be awarded for up to a further 6 months at the discretion of the PM, and with approval of the ED as above. The CB may be required to provide information or operator files to allow continued surveillance at a distance so as to maintain confidence in the work of the CB. Such surveillance will be documented, and any arising nonconformities will be monitored by the IOAS AC. Such an approach shall take into account scheme owner requirements.

If the visit cannot be done remotely or cannot be rescheduled within one year, the accreditation status of the CB will be suspended in accordance with [PL0506](#).

3 Surveillance and foreign office visits

In the case of surveillance and foreign office visits, if the option of choosing another country to visit is not possible IOAS shall conduct a remote assessment of the offices provided the CB is not high risk and is able to accommodate such an approach. Postponing operator site visits until after the threat/restriction is over or joining the CB inspections virtually may be considered on a case by case basis unless scheme owner requirements prohibit this.

In very exceptional circumstances when a required visit cannot be performed in any format within the required calendar year additional reporting by the CB and the provision of operator files for desk review shall be requested.

The type of information required and the number and type of operator files to be reviewed will follow normal surveillance practice according to [PR0508](#). The results will be documented making clear the nature of the surveillance and be monitored by the IOAS AC in the normal way.

If IOAS are unable to perform two consecutive required visits in any format the CB will be suspended according to [PL0506](#).

