



Announcer

It is time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Enzo Garritano:

Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. I'm Enzo Garritano, president and CEO of IHSA. In today's episode hosts Stacey Blea and Sam Pitaro, IHSA's lead COR® auditor, meet again to discuss how the organization can prepare for an external COR® audit. This episode will cover what to expect during the audit and how you can make the process as smooth and successful as possible.

Stacey and Sam, over to you.

Stacey Blea:

Hey, Sam. Welcome back to the COR® podcast. Today we're going to be talking about preparing for the external audit.

Sam Pitaro:

Stacey, this is the best part of the podcast, is preparing for the external audit, and it's an exciting moment for both the client and IHSA.

Stacey Blea:

Absolutely. And as I understand, and the reason that you're on this podcast episode is because you are involved in the external audit process, are you not?

Sam Pitaro:

Yes, I am.

Stacey Blea:

Okay, perfect. So I got the right man for this conversation.

Okay. So yeah, we've made it through the internal audit process and given the green light to move ahead to the external audit. So I just want to ask you a couple questions today. And I'm going to start out with, what should companies be doing to prepare for their external audit?

Sam Pitaro:

Well, companies should review their internal audit process, closing any gaps in the program if they had a corrective action plan to make sure that they follow it through. And also taking some of the feedback from the internal audit and making sure that all of the Ts are crossed and all the Is are dotted. Just get yourself well-prepared by reviewing what you've done through the internal audit process.

Stacey Blea:

Right. Okay. So yeah, with my conversation with Scott, we talked about corrective action plans in a little bit more detail, and we learned about the importance of creating a good corrective action plan and what it should be used for. Here again, obviously you're telling us to make sure that you go through the corrective action plan and you focus on that in order to make sure that you achieve the success at the external audit.

Sam Pitaro:

Correct.

Stacey Blea:

Okay. For everyone who's listening, if you haven't already done so, definitely make sure to take a listen to the episode that I did with Scott where we talk about the corrective action plan in detail.

Okay, Sam, so could you walk us through the typical process for a company who is preparing for the external audit? I know that you recommended that the Internal Auditor starts with a meeting with senior management in order to go over the results of the internal audit and starting to set some expectations about how to prepare for the external audit.

Sam Pitaro:

Yes, that is correct. It is important that the Internal Auditor with senior management have a meeting to discuss the timeline, including the logistics and the schedule. Also getting an Associate Auditor to do the audit and making sure everybody in the company is ready for the external audit. To me, it is important that senior management leads that communication to the rest of the team and makes sure that everyone is familiar with the interview questions and observations, and provide training as needed to the workforce in that firm. At the end of the day, it's got to be driven by management with the Internal Auditor being there as a resource to make sure that all of that does happen.

Stacey Blea:

Yeah, I mean, it's no secret that the Internal Auditor does a lot of the heavy lifting for the COR® process, but definitely should be driven by the senior management. So we're showing some leadership and commitment from the company to make sure that everybody else in the company is on board and everyone's working towards the same goals and that you're going to be successful in the external audit.

Sam Pitaro:

Yes. Yes.

Stacey Blea:

Okay. So what about booking the external audit? When should companies look to book the audit?

Sam Pitaro:

Companies, as per the COR® guideline, must book another within six months of receiving the internal audit results. And that six months also depends on the corrective action plan and how much needs to be done in the corrective action plan. And it also depends on their projects. And if they're a seasonal company, you want to make sure you do the audit when it's a peak for you. And the other important key factor to all of this is the availability of the auditors, and I also recommend that you get three quotes for your audit just to make sure that you're getting what you feel is the right price.

Stacey Blea:

Right. Just to have some comparables. Makes sense, for sure.

Sam Pitaro:

Exactly, yes.

Stacey Blea:

So you're talking about the availability of the Associate Auditors, but does the IHSA ever do any of the external audits, or is it just strictly the Associate Auditors that do them?

Sam Pitaro:

I'm glad you asked that question. IHSA has something called Associate Auditor mentoring audits. This is an Associate Auditor—mentoring audits is a process IHSA uses as the last step for potential auditors to become an IHSA accredited Associate Auditor. Candidates have to successfully complete three mentoring audits. Once a candidate passes the mentoring audits, their names are added on the IHSA Associate Auditor list on IHSA's webpage. So it is an important process, and we really appreciate companies being involved in the mentoring audit process.

Stacey Blea:

And just to clarify for everybody, as a part of that mentoring audit process, it would be somebody like yourself, a Lead Auditor, who would be heading up that external audit?

Sam Pitaro:

Yes.

Stacey Blea:

Okay. So it would be yourself, John, or Pete, correct?

Sam Pitaro:

Or Pete, yes.

Stacey Blea:

Yeah. Okay, perfect. So is there anything else that companies should be considering when booking their external audit?

Sam Pitaro:

Yes, they should consider peak season of work, and they know when their peak season is. Also, to make sure that the documentation that's required is readily available. They got to make sure also that the scope reflects their WSIB [Workplace Safety and Insurance Board] classification, and that's also passed on to the Associate Auditor when they're being contacted, so then they can fill in a proper NFAA [notice from the Associate Auditor]. And also senior management should be involved in this process to make sure that everything is going smoothly, and also provide support to the Internal Auditor as she or he is collecting all of this information to get ready for the external audit.

Stacey Blea:

Right. I just wanted to point out when you were talking about making sure that you do the audit, the external audit at peak season of work, it's obviously applicable to a lot of companies, a lot of construction companies, but for some construction companies that are maybe doing interior, commercial or something like that, if work is pretty steady all year round then it's not really necessarily having to pinpoint a peak season. It's just that we want to make sure that your company has representative work going on. If you're a paving company, then obviously we're not going to be looking to do your external audit in February, right?

Sam Pitaro:

Correct.

Stacey Blea:

We want to make sure that you have action going on and something that we can actually come out and see, right?

Sam Pitaro:

Yes. Because observation is part of the process, right?

Stacey Blea:

Exactly. Yeah. Okay. So would it be advisable then, if you're taking all of this kind of stuff that you just mentioned into consideration and then get in touch with an auditor in order to get something booked and put onto your calendar within the timeframe that works for your company?

Sam Pitaro:

Yes. You want to make sure that you have your external audit booked within six months timeframe that you were given from the end of your internal audit review.

Stacey Blea:

Right. Okay. So we find an Associate Auditor and we've confirmed a date. And now what?

Sam Pitaro:

Once you've completed that process, the Associate Auditor will fill in a contract, which is an NFAA, which is "notice from the Associate Auditor. The NFAA must be completed and submitted to an IHSA COR® Lead Auditor at least three weeks, 21 days prior, to your scheduled date of any IHSA COR® audit. The Associate Auditor cannot proceed until written approval has been provided by the IHSA. And once the NFAA is signed off by the client or the firm, then it's got to be submitted to IHSA, the NFAA, and then the Associate Auditor will go ahead and do the external audit.

Stacey Blea:

And just to clarify, for those who might not have been through the process before or not really be familiar with the NFAA. You're saying that it's a contract, but is that something where you'd be basically putting in for IHSA to review to make sure that your external audit is going to have enough sites, enough people are being interviewed, and is that the kind of stuff you're checking for in the NFAA?

Sam Pitaro:

Yes, we're going to be checking for the interviews that's required, like you said, observations, and it also has to be signed off by senior management because they're the ones who are going to be paying for the contract. And also the scope of work, it's got to be exactly as per the WSIB account number, the classification, and the type of work that they're basically doing.

Stacey Blea:

Okay. So like you said, you're just getting the final stamp of approval before you actually go out and get the external audit done?

Sam Pitaro:

Yes.

Stacey Blea:

Okay. So do you have any advice or recommendations on how Internal Auditors can prepare their workers for the upcoming external audit?

Sam Pitaro:

Yes. It is important that both the Internal Auditor and senior management work together to inform the workers about the audit, prepare for the interview questions, and understand the questions. A lot of times it's very stressful for the workers when they're being interviewed, so you want to make sure that the workers are at ease. We're not looking for a right or wrong answer. It's all about finding out how well they understand the company's management system.

At the end of the day, workers need to know and understand why the company is going for COR®. And the key is that COR® is a certificate recognition program where a health and safety system is reviewed and looked at, and workers have to understand that often companies need COR® for contracts with both public and private sector construction projects in Ontario. For example, some municipalities expect their contractors to be registered with COR® program in order for them to qualify for bidding purposes. So it is important for the workers to understand that COR®, once a company gets it, it provides them an extra revenue for them to actually get work and be employed by that company.

Stacey Blea:

Yeah, I think that's a really good point because I think sometimes workers are unaware of why the company is trying to achieve COR®. "Oh, yeah, okay. We're doing this health and safety thing that they're really focused on right now." But they might not understand what the incentive is. So yeah, it's definitely really important that they know and understand why it's so important. And I think that once people do know and understand why it's so important, other than obviously to maintain a safe and healthy workplace, I think that it also would help with seeing the importance of their support and their cooperation and the whole process.

Sam Pitaro:

Yes. It's a matter of creating a team culture and workers understanding the business aspect of the company moving forward and being able to bid new jobs and have continued work and employment. I think this is important for everyone in the company, and I think it's important also for the construction industry in Ontario.

Stacey Blea:

Yeah, absolutely. I agree. Okay. Well, I think we've gotten a lot of good information for preparing for the external audit. Did you have any final thoughts or considerations for this topic?

Sam Pitaro:

Yes. To me, this task is really, really important for the internal auditor to show leadership in the company and working with senior management and workers to accomplish the team goal of achieving COR® and building a very powerful chemistry, which is called the positive culture, for the firm. And at the end of the day, by everybody doing the same thing in the construction industry we'll have a safe environment, and also the work will be there for everyone.

Stacey Blea:

Absolutely. And just because you've been involved with COR® for so long now, just to get your opinion or what you've observed over the past several years, have you seen the impacts of COR® on the industry yourself?

Sam Pitaro:

Yes, I have. I've noticed that a lot of companies that have gone through COR® have a better understanding to mitigate the risk, and they've also noticed that a lot of their incidents have been going down, near misses are being reported, and documentation has improved a lot, like weekly inspections, joint health and safety committee. It's an understanding that both workers and management work together for the same goal. Everybody goes home with a paycheck and goes home safely.

Stacey Blea:

I forget where it was that I heard this, and it might've been at internal auditor conference or something, but I remember when I was an internal auditor and I heard that everyone's perception of what a dangerous job is, and most people thought that being a police officer or a firefighter is a dangerous job because every single day those guys are going out and they're putting themselves into harm's way and whatnot. So just public perception is that being a police officer or a first responder is a dangerous job. But when you actually look at statistics and see what is the largest category of people in Ontario that don't go home at the end of their day, it was actually coming from the construction industry. And that to me was really, really impactful because it's obviously something that needs to be addressed, and I'm glad to be working for an organization that takes that on and helps construction companies to reduce the risk and educate their workers. And it's a push in the right direction to make sure that more people are going home at the end of the day.

Sam Pitaro:

Yes, and it's getting out there in the industry. Notice a lot of companies have COR® on their vehicles. Notice companies actually calling IHSA and telling us how COR® has changed their firm, their belief in health and safety. It's all good, it's all positive, and hopefully it'll be around for a long time.

Stacey Blea:

Yeah, I agree. Okay, Sam, well, thank you so much for this discussion on preparing for the external audit.

Sam Pitaro:

Thank you.

Stacey Blea:

And just want to say good luck to all the Internal Auditors out there who are preparing for their external. Again, if you have any questions, concerns, we do want you to be successful. So if you have anything, reach out to the COR® consultant that you were just dealing with in your internal audit review or get in touch with us at cor@ihsa.ca and ask any questions that you may have leading up to your external audit. Good luck, everyone.

Sam Pitaro:

Good luck, everyone. Take care.

Stacey Blea:

Thanks Sam for talking with me today. Bye.

Sam Pitaro:

Bye-bye now.

Enzo Garritano:

Thank you for listening to the *IHSA Safety Podcast* and this episode on the COR® external audit.

Announcer

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Thanks for listening.