CERTIFIED ORGANIZATION/CLIENT
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)
COVID-19 ALTERNATE AUDIT PROCESS

Don’t see your question below? Please contact us at isr-mktg@nsf.org.

General Questions

1. Are NSF-ISR’s auditors forbidden to travel or go on site?
   Currently, through 1 May 2020, all North American and European on-site audits are suspended due to the current COVID-19 situation.

   NSF International Strategic Registrations (NSF-ISR), an NSF International company, remains committed to our corporate values through ensuring the safety and well-being of our auditors and certified organizations. The NSF-ISR leadership have suspended face-to-face audit contact, and associated travel, to mitigate public health and safety risks, and to comply with social distancing norms and other guidance from regional public health authorities. Other global regions are being evaluated, individually, and addressed as local conditions dictate.

2. Whom should I contact if I have questions regarding my upcoming audit?
   Your account manager can answer any questions about upcoming audits. Please be patient as your account manager’s responses may be delayed as we work through this new process.

3. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, we can’t have an audit, so how can we keep our certificate?
   In accordance with the International Accreditation Forum's Informational Document 3 (IAF ID3), certification bodies are permitted to use alternative audit methods to facilitate audits when “extraordinary events” exist. The global community has recognized the COVID-19 pandemic as an extraordinary event and allowed for certification bodies to be creative in their approach to maintaining the integrity of certificates. These alternative audit approaches differ by industry, scheme and standard, but include the use of remote audits, some relief or flexibility with audit boundaries and, in some cases, certificate extensions.

4. What are the available alternative audit approaches approved by NSF-ISR?
   Currently, and depending on scheme/standard requirements, we are evaluating each client’s situation and preference. As an output of this evaluation, we have the following available options:
   - Audit boundary extension/audit rescheduling: Audits can be moved to later in the year, with the hope that shelter in place and other regional orders will have been lifted. Note: Surveillance audits may be able to move to later in the calendar year, but recertification audits will be further governed by the certificate expiration date.
   - Remote auditing: When permitted by scheme/standard, the audit may be completed by information and communication technology, providing a virtual audit option.
Certificate extension: When permitted by scheme/standard, a remote special audit is conducted to review the backbone of the system and grant a six-month extension to the certificate. Within or before this six-month extension, the recertification audit would be completed on site or via remote auditing methodologies.

Please note that extensions (boundary or certificate expiry) may include risk of not being completed, if shelter in place restrictions aren’t lifted in time for face-to-face audit activity. Should this happen, the account manager will facilitate further discussions of available options.

5. What is a remote audit?
A remote audit is conducted by an NSF-ISR auditor from a location other than the client’s site, as if they were on site. The auditor and interviewed party will interact through a virtual platform/video conferencing/teleconferencing service, as they would if both were at the same location.
A remote audit is not emailing or transferring documentation to the auditor and having them work alone to review it. This process will require active participation from both parties.

6. We prefer a remote audit to be conducted now. What do I need to make that happen?
A certified organization would indicate this preference on its client information form and submit it to the account manager. At a minimum, you must be operating and capable of including various process owners/participants and sharing required documentation to complete the audit objectives.
Additionally, a conferencing platform in compliance with your organization’s information security and/or export control requirements is necessary to facilitate the remote audit. NSF-ISR cannot provide you with guidance on what platforms meet various requirements, nor do we provide the platform to conduct these audits. There are various suitable programs/platforms, but the demand for these services has significantly increased and there may be a backlog to create an account. It is highly recommended that you obtain an account as soon as you determine the need to pursue a remote audit.
In addition, your organization will need the associated computer infrastructure to facilitate this audit. Examples of this infrastructure include server access, internet bandwidth, office space, microphones, etc.
If multiple auditors are needed/requested, each auditor will require a separate digital workspace (e.g. web conference), and the associated infrastructure support (e.g. different host, increased bandwidth, etc.), since sharing a single meeting impacts the productivity of the audit.

7. What happens if our organization is not eligible for remote auditing?
We will do our best to work with your organization on options on a case-by-case basis. The account manager will facilitate a conversation with the appropriate technical resources to determine the best approach.

8. What happens if our organization is not eligible for extension or remote auditing?
If there is not a possibility to conduct a remote audit, within the required timeline, current requirements dictate actions to be taken on the certificate.
- Recertification audit: We are required to withdraw your certificate, effective on the expiration date, and then plan for a recertification audit to occur within 12 months of your expiration. Upon completion of this audit, and properly addressing the associated nonconformities, a new certificate would be issued, and your certification status would be reinstated. Please note, if outside of the 12-month window, a new stage 1 and stage 2 audit is required.
- Surveillance audit: Without a 2020 surveillance audit, the certificate would be reviewed for suspension by January 2021.
- First surveillance after initial registration/stage 2: This is required to be performed within 12 months of the initial certification decision, but an additional six months have been allowed (based on COVID-19-related waivers). If the surveillance audit cannot be completed within 18 months of the certification decision, the certificate would be suspended.

9. What if my organization is hesitant about completing a remote audit?
We cannot require your organization to complete a remote audit. There may be another option that works for your organization. Other options can be discussed with your account manager and technical team on a case-by-case basis.

Please be aware that if your audit can’t be completed in the required timeframe, it could impact your certification.

Alternate Audit Approach – Boundary Extension (Not Applicable for All Standards)

10. What happens if my organization is not eligible for remote auditing for our surveillance audit?
We may be able to extend your audit boundary date to a time when the situation allows for on-site audits to occur. This audit is to be completed by November 1, 2020, but auditor availability will be limited, and we would like to help you schedule your audit as soon as it is feasible.

Please be aware that if your audit cannot be completed in the required timeframe, it could impact your certification status.

Alternate Audit Approach – Remote Audits

11. Is NSF-ISR offering remote audits for all situations, standards and certifications?
Not all situations will be eligible for remote audit options. Each organization/situation is evaluated to ensure that the accreditation of the certificate is protected.

12. How do I get approved for a remote audit with NSF-ISR?
For current certified organizations, your account manager will reach out to your organization with an informational form for your team to complete. Your responses will be returned to the account manager and then evaluated through our technical team. Your provided information will be reviewed in conjunction with your certification history, in order to best define the most appropriate path forward for your organization. The approved plan will be shared with you by your account manager, who will facilitate the next steps.

Please note that alternative actions taken are in accordance with contingency policies for emergency circumstances only and are not representative of normal certification cycle options.

13. What does my organization need to do to set up a successful remote audit?
Although this is a remote audit we hope to stick to a process similar to an on-site audit.

Main contact(s) will need to be available for the full audit duration.
Key personnel will need to be available for their relevant parts of the audit. Key personnel can dial in separately or from the same location as the main contact.

You will need to either install MOVEit to allow for document sharing between your organization and the auditor, or provide access for our auditor to use your organization’s document transfer system.

14. Can the remote audit process be completed by email if video is not available?

No. If your organization does not have the telecommunications necessary to support a remote audit, we cannot perform a remote audit. **To protect your organization’s information while ensuring our operational reliability and compliance with SLA, internal governance and regulatory requirements, no remote email audits will be conducted.**

15. How are ITAR controls being managed for production activities?

It is your organization’s responsibility to disclose this information and stay within your own regulations. Review our [pre-audit planning document](#) for more reminders.

16. What does my organization need to be aware of if we are eligible for a fully remote surveillance or recertification audit?

If your organization is approved for a remote surveillance or recertification audit, here are some key items to be aware of:

- Before your audit, your auditor will provide an audit plan with more remote audit details.
- Please provide the auditor with the needed platform and login information, so that needed software can be installed prior to the start of the audit.
- Please ensure the necessary participants are available to be present for the audit. Awareness sessions are suggested for your employees prior to the audit, when possible.
- The audit will take place on your organization’s web conferencing application(s)/platform(s):
  - Teleconferencing with audio (and video where possible)
  - Web meeting
  - Interactive web-based meeting app (e.g. WebEx, Skype, GoToMeeting or other application)
- All document sharing will be done through the MOVEit platform or client provided document transfer system. **Please be aware documents will not be accepted through email.**
- Your auditor may request to be shown areas or items in your facility to meet the requirements of certain standards, so please ensure you can be mobile during the audit.
- If the audit cannot be done remotely as scheduled, or if there are issues arise that prevent an effective audit, the situation will have to be reevaluated.

17. What if we cannot show all activities of a process through remote auditing?

The expectation is for all processes (as defined by your organizational context) to be audited, and all clauses to be audited, although the extent of auditing these activities may be affected by technology limitations, access restrictions or personnel constraints. Providing that all processes can still be assessed, some activities may be omitted from the 2020 audit and moved to the next on-site audit event (recertification or surveillance).

Certified organizations and auditors are encouraged to be creative in looking for ways to assess activities, given the unique situation we are in.
Alternate Audit Approach – Certificate Extension (Not Applicable for All Standards)

18. What does my organization need to be aware of if we were granted a six-month extension due to the current circumstances with COVID-19?

NSF-ISR will need to conduct a special audit remotely, prior to your certificate’s expiration date, to ensure that the management system is in good standing. A temporary certificate is issued and then a recertification audit is scheduled within the extension period. If your organization is approved for a remote special audit, your account manager will provide details of its duration.

Key items to be aware of:

- If an extension is granted, the maximum time will be for six -months from your original expiration date and you must have the recertification audit event within the six-month extension.
- Once the remainder of the recertification audit is conducted on site and a positive certification decision has been made, the new expiration date will revert back, remaining consistent with the previous three-year cycle.
- The time devoted to performing your special audit may be credited to the recertification audit to be performed as soon as possible when public health authorities lift shelter in place orders, with a minimum of one day on site.
- If your audit can’t be completed in the required timeframe, it could impact your certification, so please schedule your full recertification audit as soon as it is feasible.

Sharing Documented Information With the Auditor

19. Should I email documents to my auditor?

No. Clients and auditors are required to use MOVEit or a client-provided document transfer system, unless an on-site audit is being completed where there is no virtual documentation exchange required.

MOVEit allows our auditors and clients to transfer sensitive information securely, allowing us to ensure operational reliability and compliance with SLA, internal governance and regulatory requirements like PCI, HIPAA and GDPR. The MOVEit system:

- Secures enterprise data in transit and at rest with advanced security features and proven encryption (FIPS 140-2 validated AES-256 cryptography)
- Enforces user, system and file security policies while controlling the movement of sensitive files
- Leverages user authentication, delivery confirmation, non-repudiation and hardened platform configurations

20. Are auditors allowed to use customer-provided document transfer systems?

Yes, auditors can use customer provided document transfer systems. Under these circumstances the client is assuming the risk associated with sharing documents through their document transfer system.

21. Can the remote audit process be completed by email if video is not available?

No. If your organization does not have the telecommunications necessary to support a remote audit, we cannot do a remote audit. To protect your organization’s information while ensuring our operational
reliability and compliance with SLA, internal governance and regulatory requirements, no remote email audits will be conducted.

AEROSPACE (AS91XX)

22. Are full remote audits available for AS91XX certifications?
   Yes, the International Aerospace Quality Group has offered relief to some requirements, as described in the FAQs. It does not authorize or approve the use of certificate extensions.

23. Will my auditor need to cover all shifts during a remote aerospace audit?
   Yes, all shifts are required to be assessed at recertification audits. At a surveillance audit, the auditor will need to assess all shifts for the processes included on the audit plan.

AUTOMOTIVE (IATF 16949)

24. Is there any indication from the IAOB to allow remote auditing for IATF?
   Currently, IATF is not allowing remote audits. NSF-ISR is in discussions with IATF and hopes to see a change in the future.