

IAF-TC-50-10

International Accreditation Forum, Inc.

**IAF Informative Document
For
Management of Extraordinary Events
or Circumstances Affecting ABs, CABs
and Certified Organizations**

**Issue 1
(IAF ID 1: 200X)**

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IAF Informative Document for Management of
Extraordinary Event or Circumstances Affecting ABs,
CABs and Certified Organizations

The International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) operates programs for the accreditation of bodies that provide conformity assessment services, and such accreditation facilitates trade and reduces demands for multiple certifications.

Accreditation reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring them that accredited Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) are competent to carry out the work they undertake within their scope of accreditation. Accreditation Bodies (ABs) which are members of IAF and their accredited CABs are required to comply with appropriate international standards and IAF mandatory documents for the consistent application of those standards.

AB members of the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) conduct regular evaluations of each other to assure the equivalence of their accreditation programs. The IAF MLAs operate at two levels:

- A MLA for the accreditation of CABs to standards including ISO/IEC 17020 for inspection bodies, ISO/IEC 17021 for management systems certification bodies, ISO/IEC 17024 for personnel certification bodies and ISO/IEC Guide 65 for product certification bodies, is considered a framework MLA. A framework MLA provides confidence that accredited CABs are equally reliable in the performance of conformity assessment activities.
- A MLA for the accreditation of CABs that also includes the specific conformity assessment standard or scheme as a scope of accreditation provides confidence in the equivalence of certification.

An IAF MLA delivers the confidence needed for market acceptance of certification. An organization or person with certification to a specific standard or scheme that is accredited by an IAF MLA signatory AB can be recognized worldwide thereby facilitating international trade.

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Approved by: IAF Members

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Name for Enquiries: John Owen, IAF Corporate Secretary

Telephone: +612 9481 7343;

Email: <secretary1@iaf.nu>

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IAF-TC-50-10**Introduction**

In a normal business environment, every organization is continuously exposed to opportunities, challenges, and risks. However, extraordinary events or circumstance beyond the control of the organization happen. In such a circumstance, ABs and CABs should have a process for the proper maintenance of accreditation and certification in accordance with the guidelines outlined in this document.

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It is important for an AB or CAB to be able:

- to demonstrate reasonable due diligence, mutual understanding and trust and
- to establish an appropriate course of actions in response to extraordinary events.

The objective of the document is to provide to ABs/CABs guidance on the appropriate course of action. If these special conditions apply, transfer of accreditation or certification would not be appropriate.

Definition:

Extraordinary event or circumstance: a circumstance beyond the control of the organization, commonly defined as “Force Majeure” or “act of God”. Examples are war, strike, riot, political instability, geopolitical tension, terrorism, crime, pandemic, flooding, earthquake, malicious computer hacking, other natural or man-made disasters.

Part 1 – Extraordinary event or circumstance affecting a certified organization

An extraordinary event affecting a certified organization may temporarily prevent the CAB from carrying out planned audits on-site. When such a situation occurs, ABs and CABs, operating within accreditation guidelines need to establish (in consultation with certified organizations) a reasonable planned course of actions. The CAB should assess the risks of continuing certification and establish a documented policy and process, outlining the steps it will take in the event a certified organization is affected by an extraordinary event or circumstance affecting business continuity.

The established policy and process of the CAB should define methods for evaluating the current and expected future situation of the certified organization, and define alternate potential short-term methods of assessing the organization to verify continuing effectiveness of its management systems.

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To enable the CAB to assess risk for continuing certification and understand the certified organization's current and expected future situation, the CAB should gather necessary information from the certified organization before deciding on an appropriate alternative short-term course of action. The information collected by the CAB should include the following as appropriate:

- When will the organization be able to function normally?
- When will the organization be able to ship products or perform the service defined within the current scope of certification?
- Will the organization need to use alternative manufacturing and/or distribution sites? If so, are these currently covered under the current certification or will they need to be evaluated?
- Does existing inventory still meet customer specifications or will the certified organization need to be contacted regarding possible concessions?
- If the certified organization is certified to a management system standard that requires a disaster recovery plan or emergency response plan, has the certified organization implemented the plan and was it effective?
- Will some of the processes and/or services performed or products shipped be subcontracted to other organizations? If so, how will the other organizations' activities be controlled by the certified organization?
- To what extent has operation of the management system been affected?
- Has the Certified organization conducted an impact assessment?

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Based on the collected information the CAB may need to consider alternative short-term methods of assessment to verify continuing system effectiveness for the organization. This may include requesting relevant documentation (for example, management review meeting minutes, corrective action records, results of internal audits, test/inspection reports, etc.) to be reviewed off site by the CAB to determine continuing suitability of the certification (on a short-term basis only). At a minimum, the process should address the following items:

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- Proactive communication between the affected certified organization and

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the CAB.

- Steps the CAB will take to assess the affected organization and how the plan to move forward will be communicated.
- Specifying the maximum time an alternative short-term assessment method could be used before suspension or withdrawal of certification
- Criteria for renewing normal oversight assessment, including the method and timing of any reinstatement activities and assessments.
- Possible amendments to organization's oversight plans on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with CAB procedures.
- Ensuring that any deviation from accreditation requirements and CAB procedures is justified and documented, and written agreement reached with the AB (if deviation from an accreditation requirement is requested) on plans to address temporary deviations from requirements.
- Re-establishment of surveillance/recertification activities according to CAB oversight plans when access to the affected location is re-established.

If contact with the organization cannot be made, the CAB should follow normal processes and procedures for suspension and withdrawal of certification.

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When developing alternate short-term methods of assessment the CAB should take into consideration the following limitations.

Initial Surveillance Audit

Normally, the first surveillance audit after initial certification is to be within 12 months of the last day of the initial stage 2 audit (ISO/IEC 17021:2006, 9.3.2.2). However, providing that sufficient evidence has been collected as above, to provide confidence that the certified management system is effective consideration may be given to postpone the initial surveillance for a period not normally exceeding 6 months.

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Otherwise the certificate has to be suspended or the scope reduced.

Subsequent Surveillance Audits

There may be specific circumstances by which a CAB can justify adjusting the timing of a subsequent surveillance audit. If an organization has to shut down completely for a limited period of time (less than 6 months), it would be reasonable for a CAB to postpone an audit that had

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been scheduled to occur during the shutdown until the organization resumes operations. The organization shall inform the CAB when operations resume so the CAB can conduct the audit promptly.

Recertification Audits

Normally the recertification audit must be completed and the recertification decision made prior to expiration to avoid loss of certification (ISO/IEC 17021:2006, 9.1.1). However, providing that sufficient evidence has been collected as above, to provide confidence that the certified management system is effective consideration may be given to re-issuing of certificate with an expiry date not normally exceeding 6 month beyond the original expiry date.

The re-certification should be carried out within this permissible extended period. Otherwise, a new initial audit should be performed.

Information to the AB

All deviations from the established certification program should be justified, documented and made available to ABs upon request.

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Part 2 - Extraordinary event or circumstance affecting the CAB

An extraordinary event affecting the CAB may temporarily prevent the AB from carrying out planned assessments on-site. When these situations occur, ABs and CABs operating within accreditation guidelines need to establish a reasonable planned course of actions.

The AB should assess the risks of continuing accreditation and establish a documented policy and process, outlining the steps it will take in the event when accredited CABs are affected by an extraordinary event or circumstances affecting business continuity of a CAB.

The established policy and process of the AB should define methods to evaluate the current and expected future situation of the CAB, and define alternate potential short-term methods of assessment to verify continuing system

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effectiveness. The AB should also define in the procedures the required reporting and communication activities with the CAB.

The CAB's communication with its AB should contain, at least, an evaluation of the CAB's current and expected future situation. The following information should be provided by the CAB to the AB:

- Scope and extent of the affected services and business areas and sites.
- When will the CAB be able to function?
- When will the CAB be able to perform the service(s) defined within the current scope of accreditation?
- Does the CAB plans to outsource its activities to ensure business continuity? If so, are these currently covered under the current accreditation, or will they need to be evaluated by the AB?
- Proactive communication between affected certified organizations and the CAB
- Is IAF MD 4 "IAF Mandatory Document for the use of Computer Assisted Auditing Techniques ("CAAT") for Accredited Certification of Management Systems" applied?
- Steps the CAB will take to assess those affected organizations and how the plan to move forward will be communicated to the certified organizations.
- Specifying the maximum time an alternative short-term assessment method could be used before suspension or withdrawal of accreditation
- Criteria for renewing normal oversight assessment, including the method and timing of any reinstatement activities and assessments.
- Possible amendments to each certified organization's oversight plans on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with CAB procedures.
- Ensuring that any deviation from accreditation requirements and CAB procedures is justified and documented, and written agreement reached with AB (if deviation from an accreditation requirement is requested) on plans to address temporary deviations from requirements.
- Re-establishment of surveillance/recertification activities according to CAB oversight plans when access to the area is re-established.

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Breakdown of the CAB:

The CAB has not been able to recuperate from the extraordinary event or circumstances that affected the CAB's business, and therefore, is no longer able or authorized to offer its accredited service, either completely or in part (breakdown of the CAB). The same applies to liquidation or bankruptcy. In these cases the CAB is obliged to inform its AB immediately.

As a consequence of the expiration as well as the withdrawal or the cancellation of the accreditation, the CAB is no longer able to fulfil its obligations for the surveillance of existing certified clients. The loss of accreditation under these circumstances should not affect certificates issued by the CAB until six months after the official information or decision has been issued by the AB.

Under these circumstances, the CAB and the AB should cooperate in establishing a transition plan for the currently certified organizations. The CAB should inform the AB about plans of transferring its certified organizations to another CAB. The AB also has to take appropriate steps to ensure that another CAB is taking over the certified organizations to ensure that appropriate transfer measures are taken as well as time limits kept. The previous CAB should provide all relevant information and materials to the new CAB to ensure a smooth transfer of the responsibilities. In case that the new CAB is not accredited by the AB currently handling the transfer of certification, however, is accredited by an IAF MLA AB, both ABs should cooperate to ensure that appropriate transfer measures are taken as well as time limits kept.

Part 3 - Extraordinary event or circumstance affecting the AB

An extraordinary event or circumstance affecting the AB may temporarily prevent the AB to from carrying out planned assessments of their accredited CABs. When this situation occurs, ABs and CABs operating within accreditation guidelines need to establish a reasonable planned course of action.

Efforts should be made to utilize another IAF member AB or local resources (including outsourcing) to complete the audit on schedule before deciding to suspend or reduce of scope of accreditation.

Breakdown of the AB:

The AB has not been able to recuperate from the extraordinary event or circumstance that affected the AB's business, and therefore, is no longer able or

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authorized to offer its accreditation service, either completely or in part
(**breakdown of the AB**). The same applies to liquidation or bankruptcy. In these
cases the AB is obliged to inform IAF immediately.

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As a consequence, the AB is no longer able to fulfil its obligations for the
surveillance of existing accredited CABs. The loss of accreditation under these
circumstances should not affect certificates issued by the CAB until six months
after the official information has been provided to the CAB. Once informed the
CAB should timely initiate a re-accreditation or the specified procedure for
transferring of accreditation by submitting an application to another IAF member
AB.

IAF should take appropriate steps to ensure that another AB is taking over the
tasks and that appropriate transfer measures are taken as well as time limits
kept. The previous AB should provide all relevant information and materials to the
CAB's new AB to ensure a smooth transfer of the responsibilities.

Once an application has been provided to the new AB, the new AB should agree
with the CAB on the handling of the accreditation logo on the CAB's certificate.
The CAB should not place on the market certificate with the old AB's logo once
the agreement has been signed.

End of IAF Informative Document for Management of Extraordinary Event or
Circumstances Affecting CABs and Certified Organizations
QMS Scopes of Accreditation

Further Information

For further Information on this document or other IAF documents, contact any member of
IAF or the IAF Secretariat.

For contact details of members of IAF see - IAF Web Site - <<http://www.iaf.nu>>

Secretariat -

John Owen,

IAF Corporate Secretary,

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Telephone +612 9481 7343

email <secretary1@iaf.nu>