



Fact Sheet – How to Get Accredited and Stay Accredited

The accreditation process

Accreditation involves a three-stage process – an initial application, systems validation review and an on-site audit process. The Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner (OFSC) does not charge companies for accreditation or ongoing audits.

Applying for Accreditation

All companies are required to submit an application as the first stage in the accreditation process. The application form requires company information, project details of sites where the company is the head contractor and a system map of where the company's system meets the requirements of each audit criterion.

Once the application is submitted, the OFSC will forward a further declaration to the company for signature. This declaration confirms that the company will comply with the National Construction Code where applicable to any work it undertakes.

A company will progress to the systems validation review stage once all information has been provided and reviewed. Applications from companies in a tender for a Scheme project will be prioritised where possible.

Systems Validation audit

Once your application has been assessed, the OFSC will contact the company to arrange a Systems Validation audit to assess the company's WHS Management System against the WHS Accreditation Scheme (the Scheme) criteria. The audit will be conducted by a Federal Safety Officer (FSO). FSOs are independent, external WHS experts contracted by the OFSC.

The arrangements for the audit will be negotiated with the company and it may be undertaken virtually or at a company's premises. The audit will establish whether there are any gaps in the company's WHS Management System that prevent it from demonstrating compliance with the Scheme criteria.

Following the Systems Validation audit, you will be provided with a detailed report describing where the criteria has been met and detailing any gaps that have been identified. The report is usually provided around 10 business days after the audit.

The OFSC will then advise whether the company can proceed to Stage 3 or requires a further Systems Validation audit.

On-site audit

Subject to satisfactory progression under Stage 2, the company's WHS Management Systems are verified at an on-site audit. On-site audits are detailed audits conducted by FSO usually over two days. The criterion used for these audits is available at fsc.gov.au.

The OFSC selects the site for audit based on the details provided in the application and liaises with companies to determine an audit date. The sites provided must be sites where the company's WHS Management System is being implemented.

The OFSC will organise for an FSO to conduct the audit, after which the company will receive an audit notification letter together with the criteria to be assessed at the audit. All the information provided by the OFSC should be reviewed in order to prepare for the audit. The OFSC also recommends that this information is communicated to the relevant staff working on the project site being audited.

The nominated project site must be active for the duration of the scheduled audit. If circumstances change for any reason, the OFSC should be contacted immediately to discuss alternative arrangements.

All system documents need to be readily available on site and accessible to the FSO conducting the audit.

Site personnel should not solely rely on the knowledge of external parties, such as consultants. It is expected that relevant company staff have a good understanding of the system.

Senior management and subcontractors should be available for discussions during the audit.

Before the audit, the FSO will contact the company to arrange the logistics of the audit, including a meeting time and location.

On the day of the audit, the FSO will first meet with company representatives to discuss arrangements for conducting the audit. The audit will involve an on-site inspection as well as a system review at the site office, or in some cases at the head office location. The FSO will also speak to senior management representatives and site personnel.

Any documents reviewed on the day of the audit are handled as Commercial in Confidence and are not shared with any organisation other than the OFSC as part of the audit findings.

At the conclusion of the audit, the FSO will conduct a closing meeting where the audit outcomes will be discussed in general terms so that the company has an understanding of the key issues identified. The level of non-conformances (major/minor) may not be specifically discussed at this meeting however company representatives will be made aware of any issues as the audit progresses.

What happens after the accreditation audit?

Following the audit, the FSO provides an audit report to the OFSC. The OFSC then reviews and quality assures the report before sending it to the

company, who will also receive a letter to advise next steps.

It is important to note that more than one on-site audit is often required to gain accreditation. Where a follow up audit is required, the process for booking the audit is again done in consultation with the company, and the content of the follow up audit is generally limited to review of any identified non-conformances.

Gaining accreditation

Once a company has successfully completed the on-site audit process, the results are presented to the FSC. The FSC will take into account all information relating to the application and the on-site audit results before making a decision to grant accreditation.

It is the sole discretion of the FSC to grant accreditation, and companies will be advised in writing of the FSC's decision.

On acceptance of accreditation, the company's name will be placed on the Accreditation Register, available at www.fsc.gov.au.

Companies achieving accreditation for the first time will be granted an initial accreditation period of 3 years, after which time companies will need to apply for reaccreditation.

Maintaining accreditation

Once accredited, companies are required to satisfy a number of ongoing requirements in order to maintain accreditation. These requirements include:

- compliance with the conditions of accreditation, including having at all times appropriate WHS policies, procedures and safe work practices;
- routine on-site monitoring audits; and
- WHS reporting (refer to www.fsc.gov.au for further information on reporting requirements).

The frequency of routine monitoring audits is determined based on the risk profile and individual needs of each accredited company. Lower risk companies with a strong track record in audit and

WHS performance can expect audits every 12 months, whereas companies that require a higher level of attention can expect more frequent audits.

All audits are organised in consultation with companies. The OFSC will contact the company when an audit is due and site details will need to be provided to schedule the audit.

Based on the results of a periodic audit, the frequency of auditing for a company may be adjusted. Where there are serious performance concerns with a company, the formal Compliance process will be enacted (available on www.fsc.gov.au).

While the OFSC will continue to work with committed companies to improve the level of WHS within their organisations and the industry generally, the FSC has the power to suspend or revoke a company's accreditation should they not be maintaining the required safety standards.

The reaccreditation process

Reaccreditation is an essential step for companies wanting to retain the benefits of being accredited, including improved WHS performance.

Reaccreditation is a requirement of the *Federal Safety Commissioner (Accreditation Scheme) Amendment Rules 2023*.

Initial accreditation is granted to companies for 3 years. At the end of this period, companies need to reapply for accreditation in order to stay accredited under the Scheme. Subsequent periods of accreditation can be for up to 6 years for companies with a strong track record of compliance with the Scheme requirements.

A company's reaccreditation process is determined by the company's audit, reporting and incident history during the previous accreditation period. Good performance will result in a streamlined application form and no requirement for a specific reaccreditation audit. Companies who have not performed as well during the previous accreditation period will be required to complete a full application and undertake an audit process.

When should I apply for reaccreditation?

Companies will be advised of the form of the reaccreditation process to be undertaken approximately 6 months prior to the accreditation expiry date.

This will allow sufficient time for all companies to undertake their reaccreditation process.

The OFSC would like to highlight that it is the responsibility of accredited companies to allow sufficient time for applications to be processed prior to the expiry of accreditation. Should accreditation lapse after an application has been received companies will be listed on the FSC website as being in the reaccreditation process.

The Australian Government cannot enter into a contract with companies unless reaccreditation is achieved, although companies can tender for building work that is funded directly or indirectly by the state Government.

For further information:

- Visit the FSC website at www.fsc.gov.au
- Contact the FSC Assist Line on **1800 652 500**
- Contact the OFSC via email at ofsc@dewr.gov.au

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