



Heads Up

Issue: 146

Date: 2009/02/16

To: ANAB-Accredited and Applicant CBs and Accreditation Assessors

From: Randy Dougherty, Vice President ANAB

Re: Maintaining Accredited Certification During the Global Financial Crisis

The global financial crisis is likely to affect accredited certification as it is likely to affect all of us. This is to let you know that we are considering strategies to mitigate negative effects. ANAB is working with the Independent Association of Accreditation Registrars (IAAR) to create an opportunity for leaders within the North American accreditation and certification communities to work together to address this subject. Certification bodies are invited to the IAAR meeting in Tampa on 17-18 March 2009; contact Milton Bush at themcos@aol.com to obtain meeting details.

As the global financial crisis continues, an increasing number of organizations may be compelled to make tough choices. This will include decisions about whether or not to maintain accredited certification for QMS, EMS, and/or other management systems. The coming months will be a test of the value of these management systems and of accredited certification.

A number of purchasers and other end users rely on accredited certification. If they experience decreasing demand for their products or services, they may decrease the number of suppliers. I put forth a hypothesis that they will retain a supplier with an accredited certification over a supplier that is not certified. Limited and anecdotal evidence supports this hypothesis so far. So maintaining accreditation certification keeps an organization competitive.

Maintaining accredited certification to management systems helps a company to continue to operate effectively and efficiently even if it has to downsize its workforce.

Several CBs have contacted ANAB during the past three months informing us that clients have asked to delay surveillance and recertification audits by six months or more while retaining their accreditation certification. The CBs have asked ANAB for a position on such requests.

After consulting with members of ANAB's Accreditation Council and the CBs that have contacted ANAB about this subject, ANAB puts forth the following position:

- 1. First and foremost in considering any request, a CB must have confidence based on verifiable information that the integrity of the management system is being maintained.**

2. **There is no option to postpone the first surveillance after the initial stage 2 audit.** 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).
3. **There may be specific circumstances by which a CB can justify adjusting the timing of a surveillance audit.** For example, if an organization has to shut down completely for four to six weeks because its customer has an extended shutdown, ANAB would consider it reasonable for a CB to postpone an audit that had been scheduled to occur during the shutdown until the client resumes operations.
4. **There is no option to postpone a recertification audit past the certification expiration date.** The recertification audit must be completed and the recertification decision made prior to expiration to avoid loss of certification (ISO/IEC 17021:2006, 9.4.2.2).
5. **At this time to try to assist CBs and to manage this crisis, ANAB asks that when the reason for rescheduling a surveillance audit is the financial crisis, the justification be documented and submitted to ANAB for its concurrence.**

It is important for a CB to demonstrate reasonable due diligence and ask appropriate questions to establish an appropriate course of action (see ANAB Accreditation Rule 22 for guidance).

There are other approaches a CB could use to be responsive to the needs of its clients.

- A. While it is common practice for a CB to discontinue maintaining records for a client upon withdrawal, cancellation, or expiration of certification, some CBs have provisions for a client to become inactive such that certification can be reinitiated rapidly and at a reduced cost from a new applicant upon the client again asking to become active and have certification reinstated.
- B. Offer the client a “voluntary suspension”; as the client will not continue to represent that it is certified, a CB could justify delaying a surveillance audit for up to six months. The information about the suspension must be publicly accessible, and the client cannot continue to promote that it is certified.