



# TIP SHEET 18

## INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

Internal audits are an in-house check to identify gaps or deficiencies in the SQF System and provide a sound basis for deciding on measures for improvement. Internal auditing is a verification method and when used properly, can reduce the uncertainty and risk of external audits. The intent of the internal audit is to help the site identify faults in their System so that it can be improved.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	APPLICABLE CODE ELEMENT(S)
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- OUTLINE THE BASIC SET UP AND DESIGN OF INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRAMS
- IDENTIFY RESOURCES THAT CAN ASSIST YOU IN ESTABLISHING AN INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRAM
- BREAK DOWN THE KEY AREAS WHEN IMPLEMENTING AN INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRAM
- ANTICIPATE SOME OF THE PITFALLS, CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF AN INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRAM

- 2.5.5.1
- 2.5.3.1

## KEY TERMS

- INTERNAL AUDIT

An in-house check used to identify gaps or deficiencies in the site's food safety and SQF System. Results are used to identify potential food safety threats and build continuous improvement in the SQF system. When used correctly, the internal audit provides a level of assurance from the external audit.

- SQF SYSTEM

A risk based system that includes an implemented food safety plan and pre-requisite programs.



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## PROCESS STEPS

1. Getting Started
  - a. Internal Audit Design
    - i. The internal audit program should be designed to cover the entire food safety system, including the application of pre-requisite programs and the HACCP Food Safety Plan and critical food safety controls that have been implemented.
    - ii. Use the internal audit process to check that regulatory requirements are being met, that Inspections and tests are being conducted as required and that the premises, its surroundings and equipment are being maintained sanitarily and in good condition.
  - b. Creating a checklist
    - i. Be sure to create a checklist that can be used to audit against the food safety plan.
    - ii. SQF already has a checklist designed against the SQF Code. This can be found on the [sqfi.com](http://sqfi.com).
  - c. When designing the internal audit program be sure to include the following:
    - i. An audit schedule (i.e., when audits will be conducted);
    - ii. Audit criteria (i.e., the area and requirements assessed);
    - iii. Responsibility (i.e., who will conduct the audit);
    - iv. Corrections and corrective actions (i.e., the response to the audit)
    - v. Personnel conducting the audits
      1. Make sure that the person conducting the internal audits has knowledge of the process, products and risks to the product. This can be an internal person or external help such as a consultant.
      2. This person should have knowledge or trained in conducting audits, designing checklists, and developing and following through on addressing the issues identified.
  - d. When conducting your assessment here are a few tips.
    - i. Define your audit objectives
      1. Some examples of audit objectives include:
        - a. Make sure we pass the SQF audit
        - b. Reduce non-conforming products
        - c. Meet regulatory requirements
        - d. Meet customer requirements
      2. Identify who should be involved. This should not just be a food safety task. Getting all employees involved will get different perspectives as well as build food safety culture.
      3. Establish the audit schedule. The schedule should include what is to be audited, who should be the auditor, and when the audit will be conducted.



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- ii. Formalize the audit process
  - 1. Define the audit time and schedule and stick to it
  - 2. Use the SQF Code checklist
  - 3. Interview your employees and involve them in the process
  - 4. Conduct opening and closing meetings with your staff
- iii. Communicate
  - 1. Write up a formal report
  - 2. Identify the non-conformities
  - 3. Take photos of good practices as well as non-conformities
- iv. Treat this as its own program
  - 1. Train staff
  - 2. Include as many people as possible
  - 3. Develop procedures
- v. Close out the non-conformances
  - 1. Implement corrections and corrective action
  - 2. Identify the root cause to prevent reoccurrence
- e. Pitfalls and challenges with internal audit programs are listed below
  - i. A common issue with many internal audit programs is that they not taken seriously and are used to only meet a Code or customer requirement and not used to identify issues, gaps, or opportunities for improvement.
  - ii. Internal audit programs fail when there is no schedule or the schedule is ignored. Internal audits should be conducted at least annually. The full system does not need to be checked all at the same time and some sites check the entire food safety system should be checked throughout the year.
  - iii. Don't use the daily GMP and food safety checks as the internal audit. Daily inspections are used to check the day-to-day operations while the intent of the internal audit is to check that the food safety system is still effective and meeting the needs of the site.
  - iv. Internal audits are not successful when there is no one person responsible or designated for the execution of the internal auditor program. Be sure this person is trained or has knowledge and experience in conducting internal audits
  - v. An internal audit is not complete if results are not defined and communicated to the leadership team. Having everyone involved in the process builds a successful program.
  - vi. One of the most frequent pitfalls is not taking corrective actions for issues identified during the internal audit. Be sure to follow up on all issues to ensure they are closed out. It is best to document these issues so that you can determine if the same issue is reoccurring.
- f. Benefits to implementing a successful internal audit program
  - i. Drive continuous improvement
  - ii. Promote ownership of the entire SQF system
  - iii. Promote a food safety culture within your organization
  - iv. Add credibility to the audit results
  - v. Improve your audit score



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## RELEVANT RESOURCES

- SQFI YouTube Channel - 5 Keys to a Successful Internal Audit Program  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC39i4KZQ7BhAg0SzuEuAVTQ/featured>
- SQFI website – Fundamentals Checklist  
<https://www.sqfi.com/fundamentals>
- Licensed SQFI Training Centers - Internal Audit Training  
<https://www.sqfi.com/training-centers/>