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Standard Practice for Environmental Regulatory Compliance Audits¹

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1. Scope

1.1 *Purpose*—This practice² identifies minimum requirements for environmental regulatory compliance audits (audits). It also provides information on the terms and procedures associated with audits as practiced in the United States of America (USA) and other jurisdictions subject to the laws thereof. It provides a reference to which interested parties may refer for definition and description of accepted audit terms and procedures.

1.2 Background:

1.2.1 *Awareness of Benefits Associated with Audits*—Various benefits have been attributed to audits. These benefits may include a better understanding of the compliance status of a facility or organization, identification of opportunities for environmental management systems improvements, reduction or elimination of potential legal and financial liabilities when implemented as part of a comprehensive compliance management program, better communications and improved relationships with governmental agencies, communities, and other stakeholders, providing information for development of both short-term and long-term environmental expenditures, and education of employees.

1.2.2 *Awareness of Risks Associated with Audits*—It is also important to recognize that certain risks have been associated with audits. These risks may be managed and controlled by giving thoughtful consideration to the audit process before beginning an audit. These risks may include increased potential legal and financial liabilities for the audited entity if audit findings are not corrected in a timely manner, disclosure of confidential business information or trade secrets, inadvertent admissions against interest because of the wording of audit findings, disclosure of audit findings intended to be kept confidential under audit privilege laws or attorney-client privilege or work product doctrine, and inaccurate audit findings.

1.2.3 *Awareness of Legal Issues*—A number of important legal issues are associated with audits. Example legal issues include the qualification for one or more evidentiary privileges, the qualification for limited immunity, the protection of trade secrets and confidential information, the application of a number of government policies associated with environmental audits (including federal and state programs that provide incentives for detecting, disclosing, and correcting potential violations through auditing), the form and language of audit reports, the necessity of reporting certain information to the government (either federal, state, or local agencies), the potential liability of auditors, and the importance of promptly addressing issues identified during audits. Prior to initiating and during an audit, interested parties should consider potential legal issues and consult legal counsel or other experts as appropriate.

1.3 *Organization*—This practice is organized in the following manner:

	Section
Scope	1
Referenced Documents	2
Terminology	3
Significance and Use	4
Responsibilities	5
Auditor Qualifications and Staffing	6
The Audit Process	7
Evaluation and Report Preparation	8
Keywords	9

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² As used herein, a “Standard” is a document that has been developed and established within the consensus principles of the Society and that meets the approval requirements of ASTM procedures and regulations. A “Guide” is a compendium of information or a series of options that does not recommend a specific course of action. A guide increases the awareness of information and approaches in a given subject area. A “Practice” in contrast, is a definitive set of instructions for performing one or more specific operations that does not produce a test result. See *Form and Style for ASTM Standards*.

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2
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4
5
6
7
8
9

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:³

E1527 Practice for Environmental Site Assessments: Phase I Environmental Site Assessment Process

E1528 Practice for Limited Environmental Due Diligence: Transaction Screen Process

E2365 Guide for Environmental Compliance Performance Assessment

2.2 ISO Standards:

ISO 14010 Guidelines for Environmental Auditing—General Principles⁴

ISO 14011 Guidelines for Environmental Auditing—Audit Procedures—Auditing of Environmental Management Systems⁴

ISO 14012 Guidelines for Environmental Auditing—Qualification Criteria for Environmental Auditors⁴

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

3.1.1 *action plan*—a plan to address audit findings that describes planned response actions, parties responsible for their execution, and expected completion dates.

3.1.2 *audit authority*—the entity or body that authorizes, or initiates, the audit process. The audit authority may be internal or external to the audited entity.

3.1.3 *audit criteria*—enforceable environmental requirements that are applicable to an audited entity. Examples include laws, regulations, orders, and permits.

3.1.4 *audit data*—information obtained during an audit to support audit findings.

3.1.5 *audit finding*—a statement of audited entity conditions at the time of the audit compared to audit criteria. Audit findings shall be based upon verifiable audit data and may be either positive or negative with respect to audit criteria.

3.1.6 *audit objective(s)*—broad statement(s) of what the audit intends to accomplish.

3.1.7 *audit plan*—documentation that describes the audit. Elements that should be included or referenced in the audit plan are: the audit objective; audit scope; identities of the auditing entity, audit team, and audit authority; audit schedule; auditor health and safety issues; audit report preparation; record retention and management requirements; logistics; working papers management; a process for promptly communicating auditor concerns for potential environmental or regulatory impact including concerns requiring further evaluation; special conditions or requirements; and whatever measures, if any, desired to maximize audit confidentiality.

3.1.8 *audit purpose*—reason for the audit.

3.1.9 *audit protocol*—a list of issues or questions designed to address the audit objective(s) based upon audit criteria.

3.1.10 *audit report*—a written summary of audit findings that is objective, clear, concise, constructive, and timely.

3.1.11 *audit scope*—a description of what is to be audited. The audit scope shall include a description of the period under review, the audited entity, and the audit criteria.

3.1.12 *audit team*—one or more auditors responsible for conducting an audit. The audit team may be supported by technical experts and auditors-in-training.

3.1.13 *audited entity*—a facility, organization, or part thereof, that is the subject of an audit.

3.1.14 *auditing entity*—the organization that provides auditors.

3.1.15 *auditor*—a person qualified to conduct an audit.

3.1.16 *environmental regulatory compliance audit (audit)*—a systematic, documented, and objective review of an audited entity to evaluate its compliance status relative to audit criteria.

3.1.17 *independence*—a condition characterized by organizational standing where an auditor is free to conduct an audit without being controlled or influenced by others.

³ For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

⁴ Available from American National Standards Institute (ANSI), 25 W. 43rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036, <http://www.ansi.org>.

3.1.18 *lead auditor*—an auditor designated to lead and manage the audit.

3.1.19 *objectivity*—a condition characterized by the absence of bias, influences, and conflicts of interest that affect or have the potential to compromise audit findings.

3.1.20 *open issues*—potential audit findings that cannot be verified or resolved without additional information.

3.1.21 *period under review*—the time interval over which conditions at the audited entity are evaluated against audit criteria.

3.1.22 *physical inspection*—first hand observation and assessment of audited entity conditions.

3.1.23 *records*—documentation and other forms of recorded information.

3.1.24 *regulatory entities*—organizations that have the legal authority to develop, implement, administer, or enforce audit criteria. For example, federal, state, tribal, or local government.

3.1.25 *working papers*—paper and electronic documentation developed by an auditor from observations, record reviews, and interviews during an audit.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 *Intended Use*—This practice is intended for use by parties who wish to perform or direct an audit, or rely upon audit findings or an audit report. Such use includes audits by internal and external auditors.

4.2 *Other Audit Criteria*—Other audit criteria may be included in the audit scope if specified in the audit plan. Examples include safety and health requirements, and technical, operational, and management requirements.

4.3 *Related ASTM Standards*—This practice is related to Practice **E1527**, which addresses CERCLA liability, and Practice **E1528**, which addresses due diligence for commercial real estate. A number of terms and procedures from these practices are similar to terms and procedures associated with this practice but they may not be the same. Guide **E2365** addresses environmental compliance assessment and may be an appropriate tool for some environmental regulatory compliance audits. The user is advised that Guide **E2365** is not an all-encompassing compliance assessment tool.

4.3.1 *Not Interchangeable*—Although distantly related to Practices **E1527** and **E1528**, this practice is designed to achieve different results. Therefore, these practices shall not be used interchangeably with, or in place of, this practice.

4.4 *Related ISO Guidelines*—The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has developed guidelines addressing environmental auditing. These are ISO 14010, ISO 14011, and ISO 14012. A number of terms and procedures from these guidelines may be similar to terms and procedures associated with this practice but they may not be the same.

4.4.1 *Not Interchangeable*—Although related to ISO guidelines, this practice is designed for a different purpose. Therefore, these ISO guidelines shall not be used interchangeably with, or in place of, this practice.

4.5 *Additional Services*—A number of issues may arise as a result of an audit, but are outside the scope of this practice. Such issues include, but are not limited to, development of action plans and cost estimates to address audit findings.

4.6 *Conditions*—The following conditions shall govern the application of this practice.

4.6.1 *Not Exhaustive*—A audit shall not constitute an exhaustive review of audited entity compliance with all potentially applicable audit criteria unless explicitly intended and stated as an audit objective in the audit plan.

4.6.2 *Level of Review is Variable*—The audit scope may vary to meet different audit objectives. For example, the audit scope may include only selected audit criteria, selected period under review, or selected portions of a facility or organization.

4.6.3 *Continued Viability of Environmental Audit*—An audit completed in accordance with this practice shall be valid for only the period under review. Because audit criteria and audited entity conditions may change over time, it shall not be assumed that an audit report is reliable, or has continued viability, for other than the period under review.

4.6.4 *Usage of Prior Audits*—Information contained within reports from prior audits should be used only if it has continued viability and if use of that information is appropriate.

5. Responsibilities

5.1 *Audit Authority Responsibilities*—The audit authority shall:

- 5.1.1 Determine the need for an audit;
- 5.1.2 Specify or approve the audit purpose;
- 5.1.3 Select the auditing entity and/or lead auditor; and
- 5.1.4 Support the audit process.

5.2 *Lead Auditor Responsibilities*—The lead auditor shall ensure the efficient and effective completion of an audit. To do this the lead auditor shall work through the auditing entity to:

- 5.2.1 Develop, with the audit authority, an audit plan;
- 5.2.2 Gather appropriate audited entity background information;
- 5.2.3 Assemble a qualified audit team;
- 5.2.4 Communicate with the audited entity regarding audit plan issues. For example, schedule, logistics, access, availability of audited entity staff to interview, operating conditions, audit team needs, and health and safety precautions;