

Quality & Food Safety



1. **Last minute doesn't work.** Be prepared well in advance. When starting a new standard start to develop and implement it early so that the audit goes smoothly and successfully. Keep your records up to date as changes occur and don't wait until you have free time. The same goes for completing annual, semi-annual, monthly, and contractor visit records. You should be following a schedule. Getting items such as training, pest control and equipment calibration completed at the last minute doesn't impress the auditor and it often red flags the situation.

2. **Audit yourself.** This should really be completed through an internal audit on the facility, policies, procedures and records that is carried out throughout the year. A self-assessment, a few months before the audit, of the facility and records, will help you identify last minute items to deal with before the audit. Completing this two months before, instead of two days before, an audit gives you time to get any nonconforming aspects under control and corrective actions and effectiveness checks documented. Remember to be tough but fair, you want to catch it and not have the auditor be the one to find it.

3. **Expect the unexpected; be prepared.** Murphy's Law states "Anything that can go wrong,

will go wrong." Nothing is truer to this than audit day. It's how you deal with the issue that matters. Remember the auditor is watching, waiting to see if you will follow proper procedure and control the risk. While this may not necessarily save you a non-conformance it may lower the severity.

4. **Management commitment.** Make sure that senior management is well aware of their responsibilities and can speak to them. Document any training or review meetings you have with them. Senior management needs to be there and engaged for the opening and closing meetings. In the case of an unannounced audit a well-informed designate must be available. A well trained auditor can get a sense of how committed senior management is before they even review the documentation.

5. **Team work is important.** Do not attempt to develop, implement and manage a food safety system on your own. This helps no one; especially if there's an unannounced audit or an emergency and you're on vacation or out sick.

6. **Communication is key.** Have a meeting at least a month before the scheduled audit date to let everyone (management, coworkers) know of the date, what their responsibilities are, what records and tasks they are responsible for and to ask any questions they may have. Some employees will

be quite nervous about potentially being interviewed by the auditor. Be prepared, an auditor will not only want to talk to those in key roles, they will also want to talk to new employees as this is a great way to evaluate your training program. Communicate with any regularly scheduled contractors about upcoming audits; they may wish to complete the service in advance of the audit date or wish to wait until after the audit.

7. **Be polite and courteous.** The auditor is there to evaluate if you are doing what you say you are doing and can prove it. If you have questions or are unclear on an observation ask them in a respectful manner. If you don't agree with a finding and it's obvious that you do not comply with a part of the standard then don't try to argue it. There is an appeals process you can follow if you don't agree with the non-conformance(s) after the audit is issued. Above all do not ask the auditor how you should correct a non-conformance: auditors are not allowed to consult and it shows your inexperience.

8. **Be efficient.** Have all documents and records in an easy to access location; have key personnel or their trained backups available for auditor interviews. Never leave the auditor unattended. It is ideal to have all materials in one room. Make sure to have someone to assist with phone calls, accessing documents or records and to deal with other issues. Give the auditor your undivided attention. The goal is to know the program inside and out, and to be able to produce proof that you meet the standard in a quick organized fashion. Make sure everyone is on time for the opening and closing meetings; respect the auditor's time and don't start off on bad footing by keeping them waiting.

9. **Take notes.** This will help you communicate key items that could be dealt with during

off shifts before audit day two. The audit will be stressful and it may be impossible to remember and communicate everything without notes. Have a copy of the audit standard with you so you can follow along during the audit.

10. **Remember no one is perfect.** 100% scores on audits are very rare. Take each non-conformance in stride and think of it as a way to assist you in continually improving your business. The same goes for deviations that occur at your facility. Mistakes happen, document them. It doesn't show a weakness if you apply an effective corrective action. If an auditor comes on site and you don't have any corrective actions/deviations recorded it often will raise a red flag.

Remember your actions and those of your co-workers and senior management speak louder than words. Say what you do, do what you say and prove it.



For more information contact:

Elaine Grant
Quality and Food Safety Specialist
Perennia Food and Agriculture Inc.
Tel: 1-902-956-3376
Email: egrant@perennia.ca

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November 2016