**EHS Consulting in the Age of COVID:**

**iSi Finds Success With Virtual EHS and ISO Compliance Audits**

The COVID-19 pandemic really threw a curveball at all businesses, forcing them to think differently about how to provide services and products to their customers. Although the pandemic has been a major disruption, something good has come out of it for iSi. We’ve been forced to think outside of the box to develop alternatives to business as usual. In some cases it’s made us more efficient and has worked out nicely for our clients too. One such success story at iSi has been virtual audits.

**Traditional Audit Tactics Out the Window**

Business disruptions unfortunately don’t disrupt environmental, health and safety (EHS) compliance obligations. Businesses still need to ensure they’re complying with EPA and OSHA regulations correctly, and for those companies who are requirements to achieve ISO Certification, those requirements still go forth.

iSi conducts several different types of audits, from records reviews, to facility walkthroughs, to a combination of the two, to ISO standards-based audits. Traditional EHS and ISO audits often have involved travel to facilities to spend one or more days onsite. With COVID, travel to and from different locations has been reduced, discouraged, and even forbidden in certain locations without quarantine. Many of our client sites have been closed to outside visitors either completely, front doors are locked, and in some instances entry has been limited to a contractor approval process. Interviewees are working on limited schedules, or working from home, making traditional methods that much more difficult.

**Records Reviews**

With travel affected, we needed to find an alternative to being onsite. Records reviews were the first and best items in our process to start with virtually. Clients can scan and upload records for reviews. Over the past year, iSi has implemented a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System, allowing us to improve multiple processes throughout the company including project management, document storage, web conferencing, online training, digital file transfer, electronic billing, and more, and so we’re set up to do a lot of different things electronically. iSi and its clients can upload and review documents back and forth electronically with a lot of ease.

**Walkthroughs and Interviews**

Although walkthroughs are a very valuable piece to our audits, we find that we can use alternatives here too. Clients can record videos of certain areas of their facilities, conduct live streaming videos, or take photos for our auditors to inspect. We can also provide guidance for how the areas are supposed to be and then get verified photographic evidence back from the clients that these conditions exist.

The pandemic has forced us all to get more familiar with video conferencing software. Interviews and discussions can be done remotely through video conferencing. This has allowed us to still get to know our clients and has given us the chance to discuss important topics or answer questions, just as if we were sitting there side by side.

We’ve also been able to give clients guidance on how to use certain pieces of equipment by giving visual demonstrations on camera and providing step-by-step instructions.

**ISO Audits**

Virtual audits have been most seamless for our ISO projects. For example, iSi recently conducted a third-party ISO internal audit for a worldwide aircraft components manufacturer to identify existing EHS Management System conformance to the ISO 14001:2015 and ISO 45001:2018 standards.

iSi reviewed the corporate EHS management system and the corporate office’s EHS management system. These systems were compared against the ISO standard, legal/regulatory standards, internal policies and procedures, and customer needs.

The audit was completed virtually through Microsoft® Teams, a communication and collaboration platform. Employee interviews were done through video meetings, and documents were reviewed through screen sharing and e-mail. Management interviews were conducted virtually and over the phone with the corporate CEO, Investor Relations, and Senior Leadership such as the Executive Vice President and Human Resources, as well as various environmental and safety committees.

All the while, iSi’s auditor remained at our headquarters in Wichita, Kansas while conducting the audit at the client’s facility in Connecticut.

Following the audit, a report of findings and deficiencies was prepared and these reports were all delivered electronically.

iSi was able to conduct a very comprehensive ISO audit for this client, covering topics such as

* External and Internal Issues
* EHS Policies, Procedures, Objectives Compliance Obligations
* Current Processes
* Leadership Commitment, Culture and Management Roles
* Employee Participation and Worker Needs
* Available Resources
* Internal and External Communication Systems and Evaluation Processes
* Continual Improvement Efforts
* Organizational Roles and Responsibilities
* Reporting
* Conformance to Regulatory and ISO Standards
* and More

**The Future of Virtual Audits**

Although we don’t think we’ll be doing virtual audits exclusively from now on, we do see the benefits of this new alternative. It’s allowed us to become more organized and more in tune with the electronic resources we have at our disposal. It’s also saved our auditors a ton of time in not having to travel far distances, instead reinvesting that time into the project itself. This, in turn, also have been a cost savings and a time savings for our clients too.

In our business, there’s nothing like the interpersonal relationships that are built between our teams and our clients throughout a project. However, virtual audits has still allowed us to develop these and haven’t gotten in the way as much as one may think they would.

The efficiencies learned and gained are bound to help future projects going forward. Perhaps these experiences have shown us there will be less need in the future to be onsite for those visual audits or walkthroughs, while the other parts of the audit will be done remotely, saving time and efforts for both parties.

Time will tell what the future of audits will look like, but at iSi we are happy that we have found something positive to take away from this crazy time.