

GSTC Guidance on Hybrid and Remote Surveillance Audits

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Dear Certification Bodies,

We are writing to provide important clarification regarding the conduct of Hybrid and Remote Surveillance Audits as established in the [Accreditation Manual for Certification Bodies - Industry: Hotel/Accommodation & Tour Operator Version 4.0](#).

Although initial and recertification audits shall be conducted on-site (Clause 8.14.3), the surveillance audits may be conducted on-site, in hybrid (a combination of on-site and remote), or in remote modes (Clause 8.18.4.1).

A CB (Certification Body) must consider the results of the risk assessment for each client to determine the appropriate modality for conducting a surveillance audit (Clause 8.18.4.1).

The Risk Assessment is a routine procedure required by the Accreditation Manual V4.0 (Clause 8.13) for all types of audits (initial, surveillance, recertification). Currently, CBs determine the risk level for initial and recertification audits based on a comprehensive risk assessment. For subsequent surveillance audits, the CB may adjust the risk level considering additional factors such as (Clauses 8.18.4.1 and 8.18.4.4):

- **Non-conformities (NC) identified during previous audits:** If prior audits demonstrate sufficient confidence in the sustainability management system and performance trends toward continuous improvement, a hybrid or remote modality may be considered. If prior results indicate unfavorable performance, these modalities are not advisable.
- **Operation location(s):** If the client's location is remote and requires special logistics to audit, a hybrid or remote modality may be considered. If accessibility poses no complications, as in the case of urban areas that do not have a high natural or cultural value, these modalities are likely not suitable.
- **Business size (# of rooms, tours, employees, etc.):** Smaller-sized clients typically exhibit fewer significant changes over time. If conditions remain stable compared to previous years, a hybrid or remote modality may be considered. When significant changes occur, such as increased employees, expanded facilities, or new services, these modalities are likely not suitable.

- **Number of outsourcing businesses:** Smaller-sized clients generally show fewer significant variations in the number and type of contractors. If conditions remain stable compared to prior years, a hybrid or remote modality may be considered. When significant changes occur, such as increased contractors, operational changes, or policy modifications, these modalities are not advisable.
- **Number of suppliers:** Smaller-sized clients usually have fewer significant changes in the number and type of suppliers. If conditions remain stable compared to prior years, a hybrid or remote modality may be considered. However, when there are sensitive variations, such as an increase in the number of suppliers, higher turnover, or an increase in service outsourcing, it is not pertinent to choose these modalities.

Other relevant considerations: factors such as the capability of the CB and the client to use information and communication technologies, connectivity, and other logistical aspects should also be considered to ensure the proper execution of the surveillance audit.

Refining the risk analysis will help CBs make the best decision regarding the most appropriate surveillance audit modality (hybrid or remote) for each client. In any case, when these modalities are chosen, there shall be a documented record supporting the decision made by the CB (Clause 8.18.5.2).

Further details regarding the risk assessment for surveillance audits can be found in the annexes of the Accreditation Manual:

- Annex C1 – Hotels/Accommodations, specified on the C1.6 and C1.7.
- Annex C2 – Tour Operators, specified on C2.18-C2.22.
- Annex C3 – Tour Product, specified on C3.12-C3.14.

Kind Regards,
GSTC Accreditation team