Managing Airside Safety Audits & Inspections

Sofema Online (SOL) www.sofemaonline.com considers the essential elements of the Airside Safety Audit Management Process

Successfully managing airside safety audits and inspections not only ensures compliance with EASA regulations but also contributes to the overall safety and efficiency of airside operations, ultimately benefiting all stakeholders in the aviation ecosystem.

Introduction

Managing airside safety audits and inspections within aerodromes involves ensuring compliance with EASA Regulatory Requirements as well as Local Compliance Obligations together with the need to maintain high safety standards.

Such oversight audits will be performed both internally by the Aerodrome Compliance & Safety team and externally by the assigned competent authority.

Challenges include ensuring regulatory compliance, maintaining consistency in audits, overcoming resource constraints, and adapting to dynamic operational environments. By adopting a risk-based approach, leveraging technology, investing in training, and fostering cross-functional collaboration, aerodromes can enhance the effectiveness of their safety audits.

Ensuring that auditors possess the necessary technical knowledge, analytical skills, communication abilities, and a commitment to continuous learning is critical to achieving high safety standards in airside operations.

Consider the following key oversight issues, challenges, best practices, and competence requirements necessary to manage airside safety audits effectively:

Overview of EASA Aerodrome Regulations

EASA regulates aerodromes in the EU reference (Regulation (EU) No 139/2014) to ensure safety, security, and efficiency. Aerodrome operators are required to establish and maintain Safety Management Systems (SMS), which include conducting regular safety audits and inspections of airside operations.

These audits are crucial for identifying risks and ensuring compliance with both national and international aviation safety standards.

Internal Audit Objectives - Key Areas to Be Considered During Internal Audits

- **Regulatory Adherence:** The audit should assess compliance with relevant aviation safety regulations, including those set by EASA and national authorities.

- **Documentation and Record Keeping:** Ensure that all required safety documentation, including incident reports, safety assessments, and training records, is up-to-date, complete, and accurately maintained.

- **SMS Framework:** Evaluate the overall structure and implementation of the Safety Management System.

- **Risk Management Processes:** Assess how risks are identified, evaluated, and mitigated within the SMS. The audit should review the effectiveness of hazard identification methods, risk assessments, and the implementation of control measures.

- **Ground Handling and Aircraft Operations:** Examine the safety procedures related to ground handling, aircraft movements, refueling, and other airside activities.

- **Maintenance of Equipment and Infrastructure:** Check the condition and maintenance records of airside equipment and infrastructure, such as runways, taxiways, lighting systems, and ground support vehicles. Proper maintenance is essential for preventing safety incidents.

- **Training Programs:** Review the training programs in place for airside personnel, including ground handlers, vehicle operators, and emergency responders. The audit should verify that training is comprehensive, up-to-date, and aligned with safety standards.

- **Competency Assessments:** Assess whether staff are regularly evaluated for competence in their roles. This includes checking that personnel have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their duties safely.

- **Internal Communication Channels:** Evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication channels for reporting safety issues, sharing safety information, and disseminating updates on safety procedures.

- **Incident Reporting and Investigation:** Review the processes for reporting and investigating safety incidents. The audit should ensure that incidents are reported promptly, investigated thoroughly, and that corrective actions are implemented and tracked.

- **Emergency Plans and Drills:** Assess the aerodrome's emergency preparedness, including the availability of up-to-date emergency response plans and the regular conduct of drills and exercises. The audit should verify that all staff are familiar with their roles in an emergency situation.

- **Coordination with External Agencies:** Evaluate the coordination between the aerodrome and external emergency services, such as fire departments and

medical responders. This includes ensuring that joint exercises are conducted and that communication protocols are in place.

- **Proactive Hazard Identification:** Ensure that the aerodrome has effective mechanisms for proactively identifying hazards, such as regular safety inspections, staff reports, and data analysis.

- **Risk Assessment Process:** Review the process for assessing and prioritizing risks. The audit should verify that risk assessments are conducted regularly and that appropriate control measures are implemented to mitigate identified risks.

External Regulatory Obligations (Typically performed by Competent Authorities)

Key Oversight Issues - Compliance Monitoring - Ensuring consistent compliance with safety regulations is critical.

- This involves monitoring and auditing processes to identify the root causes of any non-compliance and implementing effective corrective actions.

Risk-Based Oversight - Oversight should be based on safety performance and risk exposure related to the aerodrome.

- Continuous monitoring and adjustments of oversight planning cycles based on past activities and identified safety hazards are necessary for effective risk management.

Coordination Among Authorities

- Effective oversight requires coordination between various competent authorities responsible for different aspects of aerodrome operations, such as Air Traffic Services (ATS) and apron management.

Financial Situation Monitoring

- The financial health of the aerodrome operator can impact safety standards. Indicators like reduced personnel resources, inadequate maintenance, or delayed payments should prompt increased surveillance and scrutiny.

Challenges in Managing Airside Safety Audits and Inspections

- **Maintaining Effective Communication** Ensuring clear and effective communication between stakeholders, including aerodrome operators, ATS, and ground service providers, can be challenging, especially in complex operational environments.

- **Adapting to Changes** The oversight process must be flexible enough to adapt to operational changes, such as new procedures, infrastructure modifications, or organizational restructures, which may introduce new risks.

- **Unannounced Inspections** While necessary to ensure compliance, unannounced inspections can be logistically challenging and may cause operational disruptions if not managed carefully.

- **Ensuring Consistency Across Inspections** Auditors may have different interpretations of the regulations, leading to inconsistencies in findings and recommendations, which can undermine the effectiveness of safety audits.

- **Risk of Complacency -** Over time, there is a risk of complacency among staff and auditors, particularly if safety incidents are rare. This can lead to a less rigorous approach to audits, with potential safety issues being overlooked.

- **Dynamic Operational Environment -** The variability of the airside environment, including changing weather conditions, different aircraft types, and fluctuating traffic volumes, makes it difficult to apply a one-size-fits-all approach to safety audits and inspections.

- **Cultural Differences -** In international airports, cultural differences between staff from various backgrounds can influence safety practices and the effectiveness of audits, leading to misunderstandings or varying levels of safety awareness.

Best Practices

- **Proactive Hazard Identification -** Implementing proactive methods of hazard identification, such as safety audits and continuous monitoring, helps in early detection of risks and prevents incidents before they occur.

- **Regular Review and Adaptation of Oversight Programs -** Oversight programs should be reviewed annually to ensure they remain appropriate in light of current safety performance and risk exposure. This includes adjusting the frequency and scope of audits based on past activities.

Collaboration and Information Sharing

- Establish national and local safety groups to share information, promote good practices, and coordinate safety initiatives can enhance overall safety at aerodromes.

Training and Competence Development

- Continuous training for aerodrome inspectors and operational staff is essential to ensure they remain competent and up-to-date with the latest safety standards and best practices.

Adopting a Risk-Based Approach

- Prioritize audits and inspections based on the level of risk associated with different operations.
    - This ensures efficient use of resources, focusing efforts on high-risk areas while maintaining baseline safety across all operations.

Cross-Functional Collaboration

- Encourage collaboration between different departments and stakeholders involved in airside operations to enhance the effectiveness of safety audits.
    - Regular meetings and workshops can facilitate information exchange and ensure safety issues are addressed holistically.

Managing Competence

- **Technical Knowledge -** Auditors and inspectors must possess a thorough understanding of EASA regulations and a deep knowledge of specific operational procedures at the aerodrome, including familiarity with aircraft types, ground handling procedures, and emergency response protocols.

- **Analytical Skills -** Strong analytical skills are essential for identifying potential risks and assessing the adequacy of existing safety measures. Auditors must be able to analyze data, identify trends, and make informed decisions about necessary corrective actions.

- **Communication Skills -** Effective communication is crucial for ensuring that audit findings are understood and acted upon by all relevant parties.
    - Auditors must be able to communicate complex safety issues in a way that is accessible to non-technical staff and management.

- **Continuous Learning -** The aviation industry is constantly evolving, with new technologies, regulations, and safety challenges emerging regularly. Auditors and inspectors must be committed to continuous learning to stay abreast of these developments and ensure their audits remain relevant and effective.

Next Steps

Sofema Aviation Services Provides Regulatory Training covering Airside Safety please see the following https://sassofia.com/course/airside-safety-training-3-days/ for questions and comments please email team@sassofia.com