

IFS Position Paper

On-Site First with IFS Assessments



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Explanation of the IFS assessment product and process approach and our position on remote auditing

Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond, there has been increasing discussion about conducting audits or assessments on a partly or exclusively remote basis. IFS is convinced that on-site assessments cannot be substituted if good manufacturing practices and hygiene are to be central audit criteria. Documentation however can be checked remotely, which is why we have developed a split assessment approach. This document explains the IFS position on these issues.

An IFS certificate stands for safe products that meet customer specifications based on an on-site assessment

Our central concern at IFS is that our certification programmes can assess whether a company is able to manufacture a safe product according to customer specifications or can competently handle products through its logistics services. The product and processes existing in the company are the focus of an IFS assessment. Good manufacturing practices (GMP) and hygiene are the central test criteria. Both GMP and hygiene in particular can only be reliably checked on-site in the factory through the observations of an auditor.

The IFS vertical assessment approach tests products and production processes

IFS pursues a vertical assessment approach that follows the idea of good auditing practices. Before the assessment, the auditor looks at the layout, processes and HACCP plan of the production site. On this basis, he or she checks the products and related processes. This is accomplished through comprehensive product sampling, on-site inspection and assessment based on defined product and process requirements, as well as observations and interviews. An IFS auditor must consequently spend sufficient time in the production area to gain a comprehensive overview of the company's products, processes and infrastructure.

Thorough examination of the criteria based on random samples

An effective assessment trail is followed and samples are taken during the on-site inspection. Based on the product sample, a high proportion of the requirements are checked. In addition, the auditor selects further samples during the assessment to achieve a sufficiently thorough inspection.

Based on the chosen samples, the following points will be evaluated:

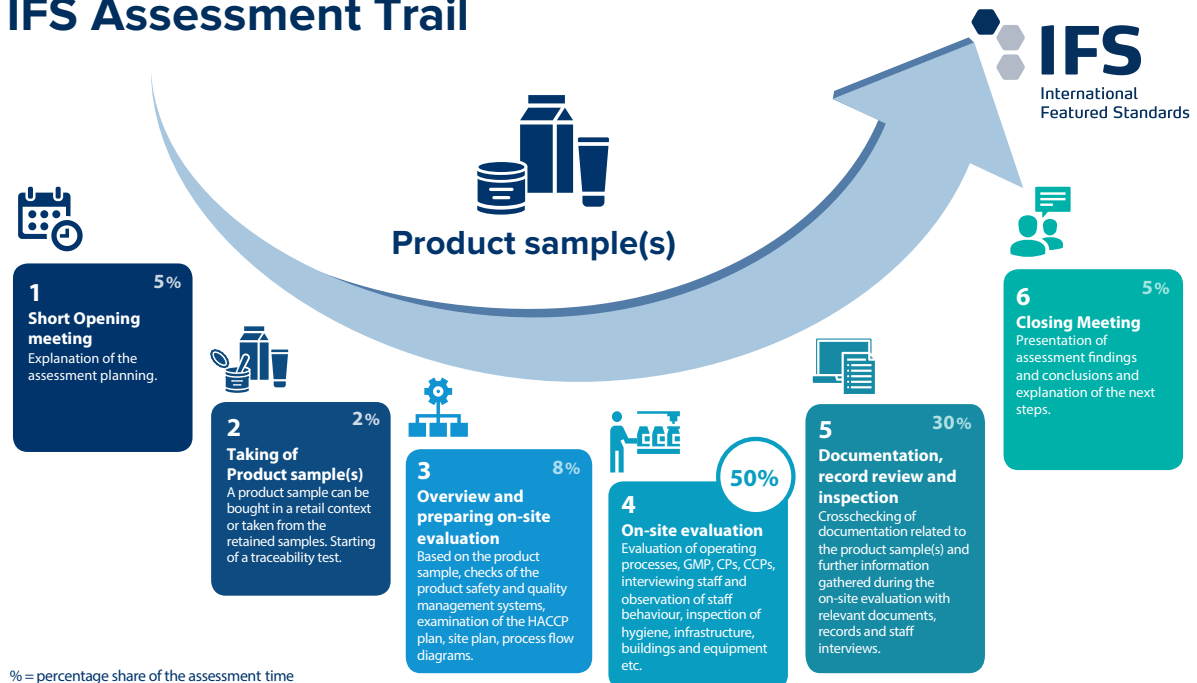
1. machinery and equipment for maintenance schedules and cleaning checks (especially if something has been noticed during the assessment)
2. plastic/glass covers for checking the glass register
3. names of employees to view training history
4. cleaning agents/lubricants to check safety data sheets
5. installation of parts to consult declarations of conformity
6. traps to check pest control
7. raw materials to trace incoming goods (COA etc.)
8. test equipment to view test equipment monitoring
9. interviews with employees to check process descriptions

The IFS assessment approach requires the presence of the auditor on site

The IFS assessment approach requires the on-site auditor to start the assessment trail on the basis of product samples. The company does not know which product samples are taken by the auditor, neither which production days and batches including their documentation are checked when assessing the food safety and quality management system. This gives the auditor a comprehensive picture of the real conditions in production.

Based on the random samples, the auditor can put the documentation in the context of the production conditions. In this way, they can get a full idea how the site's food safety and quality management system really works during day-to-day business and whether this meets their specifications.

IFS Assessment Trail



Requirements for a split assessment

During these challenging times, the market is looking for solutions for audits and assessments to be carried out on a wholly remote or part remote basis. IFS is working on a solution whereby the on-site assessment and the review of the documentation are separated. Among other things, this helps shorten the time on site and reduce unnecessary contact.

In this split assessment concept, the on-site part follows the approach described above. It is supplemented by the remote part, which includes a review of further documented information and a careful cross-check of documentation and records. This part can only follow the on-site part, as the insight gained here is the basis for a focused and comprehensive assessment of the documentation.

The "on-site first" concept once again clearly underlines the product and process approach of the production-related IFS certification programs, as the entire assessment trail is based on the real production conditions on site. The selection of the on-site sample significantly determines the scope of the supporting documentation to be audited. This would not be possible if the steps were in reverse order.

This shared approach also accommodates the performance of an unannounced IFS assessment. Companies are not "forewarned" by a preliminary review of the documents. In an "on-site" assessment, the focus is on production processes, GMP and hygiene. Only those employees who ensure a smooth production process need to be present. In the following announced remote assessment, the topics are then also checked, for which the companies often have a main contact person. This is an attractive option for the company when it comes to having the appropriate resources at a fixed date and time with, e.g. for management system issues.

Remote Surveillance Check for documentation review during the COVID-19 pandemic

The IFS committees agree that IFS will not offer a "pure remote certification audit protocol". There is also mutual agreement on remote assessment only being an option if Good Manufacturing Practices and hygiene are not considered as central audit criteria. For this reason, such an option is available for IFS Broker v.3 certifications.

We also offer the Remote Surveillance Check to certified companies in cases where a planned IFS renewal audit is currently not possible due to the Covid-19 crisis. With this check, they can prove that their supporting management processes and procedures continue to be maintained during this crisis situation. The Remote Surveillance Check is not a full IFS Certification Assessment, which results in an IFS certificate being awarded. It only includes the examination of the documents belonging to the management system, but does not make any statement on compliance with GMP and the guarantee of hygiene in the production facilities. Companies audited after this check will receive a report and a letter of confirmation can be presented to their customers.