

How to Reap the Hidden Benefits of a Mock Pipeline Audit

The need to comply with knee-high stacks of regulations is no news to you if you manage liquid or gas pipelines. Mock compliance audits are one way of rising to this challenge, and they have two obvious benefits: they highlight any gaps that need to be closed before a real audit occurs and they make it much easier to prove compliance during an actual audit.

This article is about two lesser-known benefits that our DOT Pipeline Compliance team helps our customers realize, and how you can structure your mock audits to take advantage of them. Visit info.aiworldwide.com/mockaudit to download a free mock audit checklist that will help you incorporate the suggestions in this article or to learn more about our [DOT Pipeline Compliance Services](#).

Hidden Benefit #1: Unifying Your Team

Everyone in your company likely realizes that compliance is important – but it's probably much more real for the team that's knee-deep in rule books. By structuring your mock audits to help other departments better understand how everyone contributes to compliance, you can help break down silos in your organization and make it easier to work toward the common goal of operating efficiently, safely and legally.



How to Do It

Listen for Complaints

Let's admit it: grumbling happens in break rooms everywhere; it's just part of working life. The problem comes in when there's too much of it. For example, if a regulation change related to greenhouse gas emissions means that field crews are suddenly asked to add to their growing checklist, it'll probably lead to complaints. But it won't cause nearly as many if the field crews understand why they've been asked to take the extra reading.

Are there any managers in your company that could use help understanding or articulating how compliance changes tie into their departments? Find them in the break room or give them a call and invite them to your mock audit, explain how their departments' activities relate to the regulation at the heart of the exercise, answer their questions, and listen to any complaints.

In doing so, you'll help them and their teams get a clearer understanding of how regulatory changes tie into their day-to-day jobs and you may even gain insights into how you can achieve compliance more efficiently. This way, the person who manages that grumbly field crew can explain that the extra gas reading relates to a regulation around greenhouse gas emissions. The crew still may not like the change, but they'll appreciate being informed about the reason behind it and they'll be more motivated to follow procedures that may have seemed arbitrary otherwise.

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Name the Experts

It's natural for an auditor to question your team's credibility when multiple people jump in to answer the same question – particularly if their responses conflict with each other. To avoid this, spend part of your mock audit:

- Introducing each person and his or her area of expertise
- Allowing each person to talk about their role and perspective on the regulations at hand, and to answer any questions from the group
- Establishing the type of questions that each person will be responsible for answering during the exercise

In doing this, you'll reduce the risk of multiple people responding to the same question. Additionally, by allowing the team members to get to know each other and talk freely, you'll help encourage collaboration amongst departments that may not communicate frequently, which will reduce the risk of compliance issues caused by interdepartmental conflicts or miscommunications.

For example, we observed one case where an operator instituted [compliance management software](#) and assigned the compliance department to manage it. This disrupted the existing process, which was for operations to maintain physical compliance records in multiple states. Due to a lack of communication and collaboration, operations continued maintaining physical records and sometimes downloading outdated information from the software resulting in duplicate records that contained potentially conflicting information. Involving representatives from both groups in a mock audit may not have entirely prevented this situation, but it would have helped by encouraging collaboration and giving each group an opportunity to communicate the process breakdowns and work together on a solution.

Hidden Benefit #2: Training Young Professionals

According to some estimates, only about 20 percent of corrosion and integrity management professionals are younger than 40 years old – so if your company is dealing with training and hiring issues, you're not alone. Fortunately, compliance professionals can help by using mock audits as training exercises for corrosion engineers, integrity engineers, field personnel and others who may benefit.



How to Do It

Ask the Right Questions

Before the mock audit, talk with each participant and/or their manager to see if they have an area in which they'd like the mock audit to focus. For example, if last year's audit revealed that you had difficulty with questions involving performance of a close interval survey, you may want to design your audit questions to focus on that.

Once you know the areas where you should focus, prepare questions that will help identify knowledge gaps in those areas. Here are a few examples of questions that might help refine participants' understanding of close interval surveys:

- How often does your company require a close interval survey?
- How do you communicate close interval survey requirements to your third-party contractors?
- How do you adjust stationing data based on the survey results?

Finally, based on participants' responses to these questions, you can suggest ways to shore up any gaps in understanding through mentoring or additional training.

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Incorporate Compliance Tools

Newer entrants to your company or industry may not be familiar with the software your company uses to manage compliance data. If they are familiar, they may not yet be aware of the more advanced features that may come in handy during an audit.

By incorporating compliance software or tools into your mock audit, you can use it as an opportunity to train your team on the most effective ways to use them. For example, companies that use our [Cathodic Protection Data Manager](#) can help new hires learn the software by challenging them to use it to run reports that answer auditors' questions. For example, attendees might use the software to tell the mock auditor when the most recent annual or CIS surveys were performed on the pipeline that's being audited. For more about our Cathodic Protection Data Manager software, visit aiworldwide.com/cpdm.

Model Good Behavior

During audits, small things can make a big difference in how the auditor perceives your company or department. Use your mock audit as an opportunity to model behavior that the auditor will appreciate, but that may not be apparent to individuals who aren't used to participating in audits.

Here are a few behaviors you might want to model and/or specifically mention during the exercise:

- Not speaking when an auditor is reviewing a document
- Politely responding to sticky questions, like ones around recommendations that are not yet required by law (designate an individual or two to respond in these situations)
- Limiting responses to just the questions asked and not elaborating with a lot of detail

Tips for Getting Started

To help you get started, we've compiled a free checklist that you can use to plan mock audits that prepare you for upcoming evaluations while also unifying your team and training young professionals. Visit info.aiworldwide.com/mockaudit to download the checklist or learn more about our DOT Pipeline Compliance Services.

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