

IAS Guidelines on Readily Retrievable/Available Documentation

Clause 4.13.1.2 of ISO/IEC Standard 17025 requires that records shall be legible and shall be stored and retained in such a way that they are *readily retrievable* in facilities that provide a suitable environment to prevent damage or deterioration and to prevent loss. Similarly, ISO/IEC Standard 17020 requires *timely availability of documents*. In the context of preparing for and/or conducting onsite assessments, IAS often uses the terminology “readily retrievable” or sometimes “readily available” in the agendas that are sent to Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs). Since there has been contention as to the definition of “readily retrievable/available” we have developed the following guideline.

To facilitate efficient onsite assessments, IAS agenda letters will usually request that the CAB make certain procedures, forms, records, certifications, etc., be made “readily retrievable/available” so that during the assessment, the valuable time of the assessors and the CAB is not wasted searching for requested documents. The cost of IAS assessments, like those of all other accreditation bodies, is impacted by the amount of time that assessors have to spend onsite. By having requested documents readily retrievable/available, CABs can shorten the amount of time spent onsite instead of having to search for documents that they must produce to provide assessors with objective evidence of compliance with ISO standards, guidelines or IAS accreditation criteria. In this regard, it is in everyone’s best interest to be fully prepared for an assessment.

By “readily available/retrievable,” the expectation is that the documentation that was requested in the agenda letter be available for review immediately upon request during onsite assessments. Sometimes, the assessment process may result in requests for additional documentation, not previously requested in the agenda. In these cases, IAS recognizes that the CAB needs a reasonable amount of time to retrieve the additional documentation. Readily available/retrievable in these instances can vary depending on the nature of the CAB’s document control system, availability of personnel or other reasons. The CAB should be afforded anywhere from an hour, until the end of the day or even until the next day of the assessment to produce the documentation which would be considered readily retrievable/available.

Lacking the ability to readily retrieve requested documentation may result in the issuance of a Concern or, in some cases, a Corrective Action Request (CAR). Assessors have to use good judgment if it becomes necessary to issue a Concern or a CAR and should only do so if there is no other way to cite noncompliance with respective standards.