

## AT A GLANCE

# Implementing Visual Assessment Audits for Environmental Cleaning in Five Steps

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## Background

Visual assessment audits ensure staff are following best practice. It is one of three types of audits used to measure, evaluate and improve the effectiveness of an organization's environmental cleaning practices. This document is part of The Environmental Cleaning Auditing series and its companion products. The steps in this document are a continuation of [Introduction to Implementing Environmental Cleaning Auditing](#).

## Objectives

The purpose of this document is to provide considerations for health care settings to develop or improve the auditing portion of their environmental services department's quality control program. It provides:

- an overview of the implementation steps of an environmental cleaning audit process to support infection prevention and control (IPAC) best practices,
- environmental cleaning best practices, and improvement initiatives;
- guidance on how to use a 5 step approach to implement visual assessment environmental cleaning audits within an organization.



## Step 1: Plan

Prior to using this guide, ensure you have completed Step 1 in [Introduction to Implementing Environmental Cleaning Auditing](#).

## Step 2: Audit

To start auditing, use the [Environmental Cleaning Visual Assessment Tool](#) or your organization's own form(s).

Refer to [Appendix 1: Visual Assessment Standard](#) for descriptions of visually clean items.

### Conducting the Audit

#### Record observations

A random sampling of room types should be selected so that the rooms audited are representative of the organization as a whole.

The auditor should assess both the cleanliness and maintenance of items. For example, mattresses should be free of tears and cracks in addition to being free of soiling and stains. Items that will soon be in need of repair or replacement should be noted without being marked as non-compliant.

#### Provide feedback

The Visual Assessment Tool allows an opportunity for on-the-spot feedback to the individuals as well as data collection to help create immediate and long-term improvements. The comments section can be used to note any difficulties or barrier to cleaning, describe the issues identified, or list any concerns identified by the auditor or staff member. Feedback is then given to the environmental services staff.

#### Acceptable result

Determine what an acceptable result for an audit is. An acceptable result may vary based on what the safety risk associated with an area is. [Appendix 21 of PIDAC: Best Practices for Environmental Cleaning for Prevention and Control of Infections in all Health Care Settings, 3rd Edition](#) can be used to determine risk.<sup>1,2</sup> Depending on the setting, an acceptable rate may vary between 75 and 98%.<sup>2</sup>

#### Timing and frequency

Settings may decide that audits need to be conducted weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually, based on the safety risk associated with the area being audited. A sufficient number needs to be performed in each auditing session in order to detect meaningful changes in cleaning practice. A good practice is to audit a minimum of 50% of an area (i.e. half of the rooms in a unit) in one session.<sup>2</sup> Audits should be randomly done at different times and on different days, but with consideration to the cleaning schedule. Audits should reflect how clean a room is at the time it is audited.

## Step 3: Analyze and Strategize

The information collected during audits should be reviewed and analyzed to determine what is working well and what needs to be improved. Prioritize action items based on risk and available resources.

### Collect and analyze data

The results of the audits can be tabulated in a simple spreadsheet or table, such as PHO's Excel-based [Visual Assessment Audit Analysis](#). Compliance rates can be calculated by dividing the number of

satisfactory items by the number of items that were observed. See [Appendix 2](#) for examples of compliance rates generated by the Visual Assessment Analysis Template.

**Identify barriers**

The purpose of environmental cleaning auditing is to assist staff in providing a safe environment for patients/clients/residents and not to penalize staff. Organizations should review if:

- cleaning responsibilities have been clearly communicated to staff.
- staff are adequately trained.
- there have been changes in the area that might be impeding the ability of staff to properly clean certain surfaces.
- there have been changes in the equipment or products staff are using to clean.
- environmental services is adequately staffed.
- the frequency and timing of cleaning is appropriate.
- sufficient time is being allocated for staff to do a thorough job.
- there have been changes to the amount of time required to clean an area, such as additional patients/residents on additional precautions.

**Develop an Action Plan**

Organizations should develop an action plan with strategies based on the results and identified barriers. Collaborate with staff to identify solutions that best meet their needs. Collaboration with staff includes discussing barriers and participating in shared goal setting for improvement. The next section: Step 4: Implement Strategies, identifies potential strategies to include in your action plan.

**Table 1: Example of an Action Plan**

Area for Improvement/Barrier	Strategy/Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Action Complete
Residents in room when cleaning is scheduled	Change cleaning schedule	Manager	Within 1 week	(Mark progress/completion)
Sharps container not being emptied on the weekend	Reminder to staff at team huddles	IPAC Lead/shift change lead, manager	Immediately	(Mark progress/completion)

## Step 4: Implement Strategies

Strategies used to address action items identified from the audits can be implemented in different ways depending on an organization's culture and resources. Involving staff in the implementation process will help to achieve more sustainable results.

The following are examples of improvement strategies that may be implemented based on audit results:

### Strategy A: Deliver training to staff

Education and training should be targeted to the audience and help achieve the goals set by the team. Consider the following strategies for delivering education and training to staff:

- hold educational sessions to review best practices and to target the opportunities for improvement identified from the audits.
- have staff re-visit online learning modules that are relevant to the issues identified.
- include training sessions during staff huddles. The [Huddle Resource for Environmental Cleaning](#) can assist with this.
- distribute educational materials.
- ensure materials are appropriate to the audience (e.g., consideration for level of education, language barriers, literacy).
- ensure that training is consistently made available to staff.
- vary the information delivery methods to cater to different learning styles and work contexts, and make the training interactive.
- provide ways for individuals to directly observe or shadow experienced staff.
- use a train-the-trainer approach.
- assign a mentor to new staff, or staff that need extra help.

### Strategy B: Reminders of key practices

Reminder systems can provide an immediate prompt to staff to follow best practices. Consider the following strategies for providing reminders to staff:

- Develop or use existing reminder systems or prompts designed to help individuals recall information and/or prompt them to follow a practice such as posters, cart resources, or lanyard cards.
- Identify a signal word that one staff could say to another to remind them of missed or incorrect practices.

## Strategy C: Structure the environment

The way a workplace is organized and the work is structured can be adjusted to help facilitate improvement. Consider the following environmental factors:

- Evaluate the current configurations/flow and adapt as needed (e.g., the order that rooms are cleaned in might need to be adjusted).
- Evaluate the environment to facilitate cleaning. Some areas may be obstructed by carts, furniture, or clutter.

## Strategy D: Adjust resources as required

The resources that need to be dedicated to environmental cleaning can change based on a number of factors. Consider factors that may be increasing the required level of resources, including:

- changes in practice or cleaning requirements
- an outbreak or change in the number of patients/clients/residents on additional precautions

## Strategy E: Increase audit frequency

Temporarily increasing the frequency of auditing can support improvement. Some of the benefits of an increased auditing frequency include:

- Help with identifying and communicating cleaning deficiencies to staff.
- Giving staff an opportunity to demonstrate improvement.
- Identifying further opportunities for improvement.

## Step 5: Improve and Sustain

Once an auditing system is established, it is important to continue conducting audits on a regular basis in order to identify any new gaps and to ensure previous gaps are not reoccurring. Integrating environmental cleaning audits into the IPAC program will help lead to sustained improvement. The following are some strategies to support the sustainability of improvements.

### **Engage staff in a Start-Stop-Continue Exercise**

Communicate and involve staff as much as possible in the process. Ensure that the language used and atmosphere are non-punitive and non-judgemental. Use qualitative feedback to review what is and isn't working along with quantitative results.

When making decisions about what to do next, consider a "Start Stop Continue" exercise with the team.

- Start: What should the team start doing?
- Stop: What should the team stop doing?
- Continue: What should the team keep doing?

### **Celebrate and recognize success and improvements!**

Be sure to recognize success and staff contributions. Talk with the team and revisit the action plan to understand what is leading to these successes and if there were any barriers to getting there that could be planned for differently next time.

### **Regularly reassess the Program**

The auditing program should be reassessed periodically. Determine if the form meets the organization's needs. Make changes to existing forms to align them with the organization's goals and create new forms as required. Determine if the organization is ready to expand its auditing program to include additional audits.

# Appendix 1: Visual Assessment Standards

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Items appear in the same order as the Visual Assessment Tool.

## Supplies and Waste

**Supply of ABHR, gloves and other PPE** – An adequate supply should be present. The area should not be overstocked.

**Supply of soap, paper towel, and toilet paper** - An adequate supply should be present. The area should not be overstocked.

**Sharps container is less than 3/4 full** – Fill line should be easily visible and container should be less than  $\frac{3}{4}$  full

**Waste and soiled linen have been removed** – Waste bin should not be full. Soiled linen must be removed from the room.

## Surfaces

**Doors, door handle, frame, and push plate** – Free of visible dust, grease, dirt and scuff marks. Doors in need of repairs are reported for repair and/or replacement.

**Floors**- Free of visible debris, dust, and spills. Stains will be scheduled to be scrubbed or stripped and refinished as needed. Gouged and/or scratched floor are reported for repair and/or replacement.

**Walls** - Free of visible dust, soiling, and stains. Chips, cracks, and holes are reported for repair and/or replacement.

**Windows** - Clean and smear-free with no visible debris, dust, soiling, and stains

**Light switches, thermostat, intercom** – Free of visible dust, soiling, and stains.

**Wall attachments and support railings** - Free of visible dust, soiling, and stains. Secured to the wall; if not secure, it is reported for repair.

**Wall mounted items (ABHR dispenser, gloves)** - Free of visible dust, soiling, stains, and residue. Product is replaced when empty. Floor beneath dispenser is free of product.

**Bed and Mattress** - Free of visible dust, soiling, stains, hair and strings from casters. Handles and controls appear to be free of dust, soiling, and stains. Malfunctioning of electrical and/or mechanical is reported for repair and/or replacement. Mattresses are free of tears and cracks.

**Chairs, couches, and other furniture**- Free of visible dust, soiling, and stains. Torn materials, broken/loose armrest and/or legs are reported for repair and/or replacement.

**Trays and tables**- Free of visible dust, food, medication, soiling, and stains. Casters free of hair, strings, and grease build-up. Malfunctioning table, inoperable casters, etc. are reported for repair and/or replacement.

**Bedpan and commode-** Free of visible dust, medication, and soiling. Broken and loose armrests/legs, torn material are reported for repair and/or replacement.

**Toilet** - Free of visible dust, soiling, and stains. Fixtures free of dust, soiling, and stains. Cracked or broken bowl and/or seat are reported for replacement. Leaking fixtures are reported for repair and/or replacement.

**Sinks and faucets-** Free of visible dust, soiling, stains, and soap scum. Fixtures free of visible dust, soiling, stains, and soap scum. Drain pipe free of visible dust, soiling, and soap scum. Cracked and/or broken sinks is reported for replacement. Leaking fixtures are reported for repair and/or replacement. Grout is clean and intact.

## Equipment

**Phones** - Free of visible dust, soiling, and smudges.

**Computers and keyboards** - Free of visible dust, debris, and smudges.

**Tablets and other portable electronics** - Free of visible dust, soiling, and smudges. Any organizational tagging procedures for identifying cleaned tablets and other portable electronics are being followed.

**Fans vents and other HVAC components** - Free of visible dust, dirt, debris.

**Mobile equipment (Walker, wheelchair)** - Free of visible dust, soiling, and stains. Any organizational tagging procedures for identifying cleaned mobile equipment are being followed.

**IV poles** - Free of visible dust, soiling, and adhesives. Casters are free of dust, debris, hair, and grease/grit build-up. Any organizational tagging procedures for identifying cleaned IV poles are being followed.



# Appendix 2: Examples of compliance rates generated by the Visual Assessment Audit Analysis

PHO’s Visual Assessment Analysis Template includes a Data Entry tab to record audit results. Compliance scores are automatically calculated as Aggregate Scores in a third tab and may be used as part of an Environmental Services Report.

The following example tables have been generated in PHO’s excel-based [Visual Assessment Audit Analysis](#)

**Table 1: Compliance score for visual assessment of waste and supplies**

	Waste and Supplies			
	Supply of ABHR, gloves, and other PPE	Supply of soap, paper towel, and toilet paper	Sharps container is less than 3/4 full	Waste and soiled linen have been removed
# of satisfactory items	6	6	1	7
# of items observed	7	7	7	7
% of satisfactory items	85.71%	85.71%	14.29%	100.00%
Category: Total # of satisfactory items	20			
Category: Total # of items observed	28			
Category: % satisfactory	71.43%			

**Table 2: Compliance score for visual assessment of surface cleaning**

	Surface Cleaning												
	Doors, door handle, frame and push plate	Walls	Floor	Windows	Bed and mattress	Bedpan and commode	Chairs, couches, and other furniture	Trays and tables	Sinks and faucets	Toilet	light switches, thermostat, intercom	Wall attachments and support railings	Wall mounted items (ABHR dispenser, gloves)
# of satisfactory items	7	6	6	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	7
# of items observed	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
% of targets Cleaned	100.00%	85.71%	85.71%	100.00%	85.71%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	85.71%	100.00%
Category: Total # of satisfactory items	87												
Category: Total # of items observed	91												
Category: % satisfactory	95.60%												

**Table 3: Compliance score for visual assessment of equipment**

	Equipment							
	Phones	Computers and keyboards	Tables and other portable electronics	Fans vents and other HVAC componenets	Mobile equipment (walker, wheelchair)	Portable electronic communication devices	IV Poles	Other Medical equipment
# of satisfactory items	6	7	7	7	7	6	7	7
# of items observed	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
% of targets Cleaned	85.71%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	85.71%	100.00%	100.00%
Category: Total # of satisfactory items	54							
Category: Total # of items observed	56							
Category: % satisfactory	96.43%							

## References

1. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee. Best practices for environmental cleaning for prevention and control of infections in all health care settings. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2018. Available from: [www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/B/2018/bp-environmental-cleaning.pdf](http://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/B/2018/bp-environmental-cleaning.pdf)
2. National Patient Safety Agency. National standards of healthcare cleanliness: 2021 [Internet]. Redditch, UK: National Health Service England; 2021 [cited 2022 Jul 18]. Available from: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/B0271-national-standards-of-healthcare-cleanliness-2021.pdf>

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