

Setting your critical control verification cadence

A practical guide

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Most organisations that start taking critical control verification seriously run into the same question quickly: how often is enough?

The answer most people land on is some version of "regularly" or "in line with our audit cycle." Neither is wrong, exactly. But neither gives you a basis for being confident you're catching gaps before they become incidents.

Follow this guide to get started with setting your verification cadence in line with critical control usage.

THE STARTING POINT: 10% OF ACTIVITY

Critical control verification frequency should track exposure risk – how often a critical control is being relied on to prevent serious harm – not the calendar.

The rule of thumb: verify a critical control once for every 10 interactions with it.

If a critical control is used 100 times in a given period, verify it 10 times across that period. If it's used 50 times, verify it 5 times.

This gives you a concrete starting point that has a direct relationship to how much the critical control is doing – and how quickly a gap would be caught if one opened up.

The exception is hardwired controls that work regardless of human activity – in these cases, verification cadence should follow manufacturer guidance.

WHEN TO SCALE BACK

Once verifications are passing consistently, demonstrating that the critical control is repeatedly found to be in place and working, there's a basis for reducing frequency.

Moving from 1 verification in 10 usages to 1 in 15 or 1 in 20 is reasonable – when the track record supports it.

Before reducing frequency, work through checks listed to the right.

CHECK 1: CRITICAL CONTROL STABILITY

How reliable is this critical control in real conditions?

- Variable (*behaviour-dependent, environment-sensitive, frequently bypassed under pressure*) → maintain higher frequency
- Stable (*simple, well-established, rarely affected by change*) → more room to reduce

CHECK 2: RATE OF CHANGE

How much is the work environment changing?

- High change (*new people, new equipment, new pressures, new conditions*) → recent history is a less reliable guide; maintain higher frequency
- Stable environment → recent track record is more meaningful; more room to reduce

A NOTE ON FREQUENCY FLOORS

There's no universal minimum frequency for critical control verification – the checks listed here are the floor.

A critical control that passes them consistently may be verified less often than one that doesn't – but it should never go unverified for long enough that a significant change in the work environment could go undetected.

THE DECISION

- ✅ If both checks come back as low risk, reducing frequency is reasonable.
- ❌ If either check comes back high, hold frequency – or increase it – until the picture changes.