

Advice and Guidance on Community Auditors

You may be aware of community auditors; they are known to enter property from a public area and can have cameras or sometimes drones to capture footage.

WTN is providing this sheet to enable your organisation to consider this issue. Organisations should seek their own guidance on this and if prioritised, prepare processes and procedures as part of your business as usual.

Community Auditors are part of a broader movement where "auditors" film public and private premises to test transparency, highlight legal rights, and, sometimes, provoke responses that generate views online.

An article on community auditors from the Yourfilm website describes auditors as individuals who film from legally accessible places to observe reactions to their presence, often stressing the message "photography is not a crime." While their stated aim is to advocate for transparency, these videos often go viral when security or staff engage with them.

What does a typical approach look like?

- Filming a business from outside the premises.
- Provoking a response by lingering in visible areas or flying a drone.
- Arguing the legal right to film and fly drones in publicly accessible airspace.
- Publishing videos that showcase any tense or confrontational reactions from staff.

Can they do this?

- Photography in public spaces is legal. Filming a commercial property from a public area is not illegal. There is no right to privacy for individuals or properties visible from public spaces.
- Drone flights over private property. Auditors can legally fly drones over commercial property from a public space, as airspace rights are complex and generally do not restrict low-altitude flights of sub-250g drones. You are also not entitled to ask for proof of permits or insurance.

How should I play it?

1. Public privacy expectations. Staff should remember that public interactions are not private. Once you engage with an auditor, you are likely to appear in their video, which may be published online.
2. No interaction = No content. The most effective approach is often to ignore the auditor. These videos thrive on reactions, so a lack of engagement may reduce their incentive to post the footage.
3. Professional and courteous engagement. If engagement is necessary, do so politely and professionally. You may ask if they need assistance or if you can provide information but avoid confrontational language.

Remember, they have likely researched their legal rights thoroughly.

Escalation and safety procedures

- Ensure the encounter is logged at the time and report as necessary.
- If the situation escalates and there is any threat to personal safety, prioritise safety and call 999 immediately.
- You may wish to review your own policies and procedure to ensure all staff are aware of the correct process to follow and are able to spot and anticipate any such events.

Top Tips

1. Avoid engagement, if possible, as it reduces the likelihood of being featured online.
2. Be professional if you do engage, and keep interactions brief and courteous.
3. Stay informed on basic legalities to ensure confidence and avoid misstatements.
4. Contact a manager if the situation feels uncomfortable or requires further action.

By remaining calm, respectful, and informed, you can effectively manage these interactions, reducing the likelihood of adverse publicity while protecting the integrity of your operations.

What next?

Always seek advice and guidance on any issues which could present you with a further legal challenge or compromise safeguarding of individuals.

Remember de-escalation tactics are key.