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Effective for audits of financial statements
for periods beginning on or after 15 December 2004

Hong Kong Standard on Auditing 570

Going Concern



Hong Kong Institute of
Certified Public Accountants
香港會計師公會

HONG KONG STANDARD ON AUDITING 570

GOING CONCERN

(Effective for audits of financial statements
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CONTENTS

	Paragraphs
Introduction	1-2
Management's Responsibility	3-8
Auditor's Responsibility	9-10
Planning the Audit and Performing Risk Assessment Procedures	11-16
Evaluating Management's Assessment	17-21
Period Beyond Management's Assessment	22-25
Further Audit Procedures when Events or Conditions are Identified.....	26-29
Audit Conclusions and Reporting	30-38
Significant Delay In the Signature or Approval of Financial Statements	39
Effective Date	40
Conformity and Compliance with International Standards on Auditing.....	41

Hong Kong Standard on Auditing (HKSA) 570, "Going Concern" should be read in the context of the "Preface to Hong Kong Standards on Quality Control, Auditing, Assurance and Related Services" which sets out the application and authority of HKSAs.

Introduction

1. The purpose of this Hong Kong Standard on Auditing (HKSA) is to establish standards and provide guidance on the auditor's responsibility in the audit of financial statements with respect to the going concern assumption used in the preparation of the financial statements, including considering management's assessment of the entity's ability to continue as a going concern.
2. **When planning and performing audit procedures and in evaluating the results thereof, the auditor should consider the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern assumption in the preparation of the financial statements.**

Management's Responsibility

3. The going concern assumption is a fundamental principle in the preparation of financial statements. Under the going concern assumption, an entity is ordinarily viewed as continuing in business for the foreseeable future with neither the intention nor the necessity of liquidation, ceasing trading or seeking protection from creditors pursuant to laws or regulations. Accordingly, assets and liabilities are recorded on the basis that the entity will be able to realize its assets and discharge its liabilities in the normal course of business.
4. Some financial reporting frameworks contain an explicit requirement¹ for management to make a specific assessment of the entity's ability to continue as a going concern, and standards regarding matters to be considered and disclosures to be made in connection with going concern. For example, Hong Kong Accounting Standard (HKAS) 1 "Presentation of Financial Statements" requires management to make an assessment of an enterprise's ability to continue as a going concern.²
5. In other financial reporting frameworks, there may be no explicit requirement for management to make a specific assessment of the entity's ability to continue as a going concern. Nevertheless, since the going concern assumption is a fundamental principle in the preparation of the financial statements, management has a responsibility to assess the entity's ability to continue as a going concern even if the financial reporting framework does not include an explicit responsibility to do so.
6. When there is a history of profitable operations and a ready access to financial resources, management may make its assessment without detailed analysis.
7. Management's assessment of the going concern assumption involves making a judgment, at a particular point in time, about the future outcome of events or conditions which are inherently uncertain. The following factors are relevant:
 - In general terms, the degree of uncertainty associated with the outcome of an event or condition increases significantly the further into the future a judgment is being made about the outcome of an event or condition. For that reason, most financial reporting

¹ The detailed requirements regarding management's responsibility to assess the entity's ability to continue as a going concern and related financial statement disclosures may be set out in accounting standards, legislation or regulation.

² HKAS 1 "Presentation of Financial Statements" paragraphs 23 and 24 state: "When preparing financial statements, management should make an assessment of an enterprise's ability to continue as a going concern. Financial statements should be prepared on a going concern basis unless management intends to liquidate the enterprise or to cease trading, or has no realistic alternative but to do so. When management is aware, in making its assessment, of material uncertainties related to events or conditions which may cast significant doubt upon the enterprise's ability to continue as a going concern, those uncertainties should be disclosed. When the financial statements are not prepared on a going concern basis, that fact should be disclosed, together with the basis on which the financial statements are prepared and the reasons why the enterprise is not considered to be a going concern."

In assessing whether the going concern assumption is appropriate, management takes into account all available information for the foreseeable future, which should be at least, but is not limited to, twelve months from the balance sheet date. The degree of consideration depends on the facts in each case. When an enterprise has a history of profitable operations and ready access to financial resources, a conclusion that the going concern basis of accounting is appropriate can be reached without detailed analysis. In other cases, management may need to consider a wide range of factors surrounding current and expected profitability, debt repayment schedules and potential sources of replacement financing before it can satisfy itself that the going concern basis is appropriate."

frameworks that require an explicit management assessment specify the period for which management is required to take into account all available information.

- Any judgment about the future is based on information available at the time at which the judgment is made. Subsequent events can contradict a judgment which was reasonable at the time it was made.
 - The size and complexity of the entity, the nature and condition of its business and the degree to which it is affected by external factors all affect the judgment regarding the outcome of events or conditions.
8. Examples of events or conditions, which may give rise to business risks, that individually or collectively may cast significant doubt about the going concern assumption are set out below. This listing is not all-inclusive nor does the existence of one or more of the items always signify that a material uncertainty³ exists.

Financial

- Net liability or net current liability position.
- Fixed-term borrowings approaching maturity without realistic prospects of renewal or repayment; or excessive reliance on short-term borrowings to finance long-term assets.
- Indications of withdrawal of financial support by debtors and other creditors.
- Negative operating cash flows indicated by historical or prospective financial statements.
- Adverse key financial ratios.
- Substantial operating losses or significant deterioration in the value of assets used to generate cash flows.
- Arrears or discontinuance of dividends.
- Inability to pay creditors on due dates.
- Inability to comply with the terms of loan agreements.
- Change from credit to cash-on-delivery transactions with suppliers.
- Inability to obtain financing for essential new product development or other essential investments.

Operating

- Loss of key management without replacement.
- Loss of a major market, franchise, license, or principal supplier.
- Labor difficulties or shortages of important supplies.

Other

- Non-compliance with capital or other statutory requirements.
- Pending legal or regulatory proceedings against the entity that may, if successful, result in claims that are unlikely to be satisfied.
- Changes in legislation or government policy expected to adversely affect the entity.

The significance of such events or conditions often can be mitigated by other factors. For example, the effect of an entity being unable to make its normal debt repayments may be counter-balanced by management's plans to maintain adequate cash flows by alternative means, such as by disposal of assets, rescheduling of loan repayments, or obtaining

³ The phrase "material uncertainty" is used in HKAS 1 in discussing the uncertainties related to events or conditions which may cast significant doubt on the enterprise's ability to continue as a going concern that should be disclosed in the financial statements. In other financial reporting frameworks, and elsewhere in the HKSAs, the phrase "significant uncertainties" is used in similar circumstances.

additional capital. Similarly, the loss of a principal supplier may be mitigated by the availability of a suitable alternative source of supply.

Auditor's Responsibility

9. The auditor's responsibility is to consider the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern assumption in the preparation of the financial statements, and consider whether there are material uncertainties about the entity's ability to continue as a going concern that need to be disclosed in the financial statements. The auditor considers the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern assumption even if the financial reporting framework used in the preparation of the financial statements does not include an explicit requirement for management to make a specific assessment of the entity's ability to continue as a going concern.
10. The auditor cannot predict future events or conditions that may cause an entity to cease to continue as a going concern. Accordingly, the absence of any reference to going concern uncertainty in an auditor's report cannot be viewed as a guarantee as to the entity's ability to continue as a going concern.

Planning the Audit and Performing Risk Assessment Procedures

11. In obtaining an understanding of the entity, the auditor should consider whether there are events or conditions and related business risks which may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern.
12. The auditor should remain alert for audit evidence of events or conditions and related business risks which may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern in performing audit procedures throughout the audit. If such events or conditions are identified, the auditor should, in addition to performing the procedures in paragraph 26, consider whether they affect the auditor's assessment of the risks of material misstatement.
13. The auditor considers events and conditions relating to the going concern assumption when performing risk assessment procedures, because this allows for more timely discussions with management, review of management's plans and resolution of any identified going concern issues.
14. In some cases, management may have already made a preliminary assessment when the auditor is performing risk assessment procedures. If so, the auditor reviews that assessment to determine whether management has identified events or conditions, such as those discussed in paragraph 8, and management's plans to address them.
15. If management has not yet made a preliminary assessment, the auditor discusses with management the basis for their intended use of the going concern assumption, and inquires of management whether events or conditions, such as those discussed in paragraph 8, exist. The auditor may request management to begin making its assessment, particularly when the auditor has already identified events or conditions relating to the going concern assumption.
16. The auditor considers the effect of identified events or conditions when assessing the risks of material misstatement and, therefore, their existence may affect the nature, timing and extent of the auditor's further procedures in response to the assessed risks.

Evaluating Management's Assessment

17. The auditor should evaluate management's assessment of the entity's ability to continue as a going concern.
18. The auditor should consider the same period as that used by management in making its assessment under the applicable financial reporting framework. If management's assessment of the entity's ability to continue as a going concern covers less than twelve months from the balance sheet date, the auditor should ask management to extend its assessment period to twelve months from the balance sheet date.

19. Management's assessment of the entity's ability to continue as a going concern is a key part of the auditor's consideration of the going concern assumption. As noted in paragraph 7, most financial reporting frameworks requiring an explicit management assessment specify the period for which management is required to take into account all available information⁴.
20. In evaluating management's assessment, the auditor considers the process management followed to make its assessment, the assumptions on which the assessment is based and management's plans for future action. The auditor considers whether the assessment has taken into account all relevant information of which the auditor is aware as a result of the audit procedures.
21. As noted in paragraph 6, when there is a history of profitable operations and a ready access to financial resources, management may make its assessment without detailed analysis. In such circumstances, the auditor's conclusion about the appropriateness of this assessment normally is also made without the need for performing detailed procedures. When events or conditions have been identified which may cast significant doubt about the entity's ability to continue as a going concern, however, the auditor performs additional audit procedures, as described in paragraph 26.

Period Beyond Management's Assessment

22. **The auditor should inquire of management as to its knowledge of events or conditions and related business risks beyond the period of assessment used by management that may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern.**
23. The auditor is alert to the possibility that there may be known events, scheduled or otherwise, or conditions that will occur beyond the period of assessment used by management that may bring into question the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern assumption in preparing the financial statements. The auditor may become aware of such known events or conditions during the planning and performance of the audit, including subsequent events procedures.
24. Since the degree of uncertainty associated with the outcome of an event or condition increases as the event or condition is further into the future, in considering such events or conditions, the indications of going concern issues will need to be significant before the auditor considers taking further action. The auditor may need to ask management to determine the potential significance of the event or condition on their going concern assessment.
25. The auditor does not have a responsibility to design audit procedures other than inquiry of management to test for indications of events or conditions which cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern beyond the period assessed by management which, as discussed in paragraph 18, would be at least twelve months from the balance sheet date.

Further Audit Procedures when Events or Conditions are Identified

26. **When events or conditions have been identified which may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern, the auditor should:**
 - (a) **Review management's plans for future actions based on its going concern assessment;**
 - (b) **Gather sufficient appropriate audit evidence to confirm or dispel whether or not a material uncertainty exists through carrying out audit procedures considered necessary, including considering the effect of any plans of management and other mitigating factors; and**

⁴ For example, HKAS 1 defines this as a period that should be at least, but is not limited to, twelve months from the balance sheet date.

- (c) **Seek written representations from management regarding its plans for future action.**
27. Events or conditions which may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern may be identified in performing risk assessment procedures or in the course of performing further audit procedures. The process of considering events or conditions continues as the audit progresses. When the auditor believes such events or conditions may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern, certain audit procedures may take on added significance. The auditor inquires of management as to its plans for future action, including its plans to liquidate assets, borrow money or restructure debt, reduce or delay expenditures, or increase capital. The auditor also considers whether any additional facts or information are available since the date on which management made its assessment. The auditor obtains sufficient appropriate audit evidence that management's plans are feasible and that the outcome of these plans will improve the situation.
28. Audit procedures that are relevant in this regard may include the following:
- Analyzing and discussing cash flow, profit and other relevant forecasts with management.
 - Analyzing and discussing the entity's latest available interim financial statements.
 - Reviewing the terms of debentures and loan agreements and determining whether any have been breached.
 - Reading minutes of the meetings of shareholders, those charged with governance and relevant committees for reference to financing difficulties.
 - Inquiring of the entity's lawyer regarding the existence of litigation and claims and the reasonableness of management's assessments of their outcome and the estimate of their financial implications.
 - Confirming the existence, legality and enforceability of arrangements to provide or maintain financial support with related and third parties and assessing the financial ability of such parties to provide additional funds.
 - Considering the entity's plans to deal with unfilled customer orders.
 - Reviewing events after period end to identify those that either mitigate or otherwise affect the entity's ability to continue as a going concern.
29. When analysis of cash flow is a significant factor in considering the future outcome of events or conditions the auditor considers:
- (a) The reliability of the entity's information system for generating such information; and
 - (b) Whether there is adequate support for the assumptions underlying the forecast.
- In addition the auditor compares:
- (a) The prospective financial information for recent prior periods with historical results; and
 - (b) The prospective financial information for the current period with results achieved to date.

Audit Conclusions and Reporting

30. **Based on the audit evidence obtained, the auditor should determine if, in the auditor's judgment, a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that alone or in aggregate, may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern.**
31. A material uncertainty exists when the magnitude of its potential impact is such that, in the auditor's judgment, clear disclosure of the nature and implications of the uncertainty is necessary for the presentation of the financial statements not to be misleading.

Going Concern Assumption Appropriate But a Material Uncertainty Exists

32. If the use of the going concern assumption is appropriate but a material uncertainty exists, the auditor considers whether the financial statements:
- (a) Adequately describe the principal events or conditions that give rise to the significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue in operation and management's plans to deal with these events or conditions; and
 - (b) State clearly that there is a material uncertainty related to events or conditions which may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern and, therefore, that it may be unable to realize its assets and discharge its liabilities in the normal course of business.
33. **If adequate disclosure is made in the financial statements, the auditor should express an unqualified opinion but modify the auditor's report by adding an emphasis of matter paragraph that highlights the existence of a material uncertainty relating to the event or condition that may cast significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern and draws attention to the note in the financial statements that discloses the matters set out in paragraph 32.** In evaluating the adequacy of the financial statement disclosure, the auditor considers whether the information explicitly draws the reader's attention to the possibility that the entity may be unable to continue realizing its assets and discharging its liabilities in the normal course of business. The following is an example of such a paragraph when the auditor is satisfied as to the adequacy of the note disclosure:

"Without qualifying our opinion, we draw attention to Note X in the financial statements which indicates that the Company incurred a net loss of ZZZ during the year ended 31 December 20X1 and, as of that date, the Company's current liabilities exceeded its total assets by ZZZ. These conditions, along with other matters as set forth in Note X, indicate the existence of a material uncertainty which may cast significant doubt about the Company's ability to continue as a going concern."

In extreme cases, such as situations involving multiple material uncertainties that are significant to the financial statements, the auditor may consider it appropriate to express a disclaimer of opinion instead of adding an emphasis of matter paragraph.

34. **If adequate disclosure is not made in the financial statements, the auditor should express a qualified or adverse opinion, as appropriate. The report should include specific reference to the fact that there is a material uncertainty that may cast significant doubt about the entity's ability to continue as a going concern.** The following is an example of the relevant paragraphs when a qualified opinion is to be expressed:

"The Company's financing arrangements expire and amounts outstanding are payable on 19 March 20X1. The Company has been unable to re-negotiate or obtain replacement financing. This situation indicates the existence of a material uncertainty which may cast significant doubt on the Company's ability to continue as a going concern and therefore it may be unable to realize its assets and discharge its liabilities in the normal course of business. The financial statements (and notes thereto) do not disclose this fact."

In our opinion, except for the omission of the information included in the preceding paragraph, the financial statements give a true and fair view of (present fairly, in all material respects) the financial position of the Company at 31 December 20X0 and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with ..."

The following is an example of the relevant paragraphs when an adverse opinion is to be expressed:

"The Company's financing arrangements expired and the amount outstanding was payable on 31 December 20X0. The Company has been unable to re-

negotiate or obtain replacement financing and is considering filing for bankruptcy. These events indicate a material uncertainty which may cast significant doubt on the Company's ability to continue as a going concern and therefore it may be unable to realize its assets and discharge its liabilities in the normal course of business. The financial statements (and notes thereto) do not disclose this fact.

In our opinion, because of the omission of the information mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the financial statements do not give a true and fair view of (or do not present fairly) the financial position of the Company as at 31 December 20X0, and of its results of operations and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with... (and do not comply with...) ..."

Going Concern Assumption Inappropriate

35. **If, in the auditor's judgment, the entity will not be able to continue as a going concern, the auditor should express an adverse opinion if the financial statements have been prepared on a going concern basis.** If, on the basis of the additional audit procedures carried out and the information obtained, including the effect of management's plans, the auditor's judgment is that the entity will not be able to continue as a going concern, the auditor concludes, regardless of whether or not disclosure has been made, that the going concern assumption used in the preparation of the financial statements is inappropriate and expresses an adverse opinion.
36. When the entity's management has concluded that the going concern assumption used in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate, the financial statements need to be prepared on an alternative authoritative basis. If on the basis of the additional audit procedures carried out and the information obtained the auditor determines the alternative basis is appropriate, the auditor can issue an unqualified opinion if there is adequate disclosure but may require an emphasis of matter in the auditor's report to draw the user's attention to that basis.

Management Unwilling to Make or Extend its Assessment

37. **If management is unwilling to make or extend its assessment when requested to do so by the auditor, the auditor should consider the need to modify the auditor's report as a result of the limitation on the scope of the auditor's work.** In certain circumstances, such as those described in paragraphs 15, 18 and 24, the auditor may believe that it is necessary to ask management to make or extend its assessment. If management is unwilling to do so, it is not the auditor's responsibility to rectify the lack of analysis by management, and a modified report may be appropriate because it may not be possible for the auditor to obtain sufficient appropriate evidence regarding the use of the going concern assumption in the preparation of the financial statements.
38. In some circumstances, the lack of analysis by management may not preclude the auditor from being satisfied about the entity's ability to continue as a going concern. For example, the auditor's other procedures may be sufficient to assess the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern assumption in the preparation of the financial statements because the entity has a history of profitable operations and a ready access to financial resources. In other circumstances, however, the auditor may not be able to confirm or dispel, in the absence of management's assessment, whether or not events or conditions exist which indicate there may be a significant doubt on the entity's ability to continue as a going concern, or the existence of plans management has put in place to address them or other mitigating factors. In these circumstances, the auditor modifies the auditor's report.

Significant Delay in the Signature or Approval of Financial Statements

39. When there is significant delay in the signature or approval of the financial statements by management after the balance sheet date, the auditor considers the reasons for the delay. When the delay could be related to events or conditions relating to the going concern assessment, the auditor considers the need to perform additional audit procedures, as

described in paragraph 26, as well as the effect on the auditor's conclusion regarding the existence of a material uncertainty, as described in paragraph 30.

Effective Date

40. This HKSA is effective for audits of financial statements for periods beginning on or after 15 December 2004.

Conformity and Compliance with International Standards on Auditing

41. As of June 2005 (date of issue), this HKSA conforms with International Standard on Auditing (ISA) 570, "Going Concern". Compliance with the requirements of this HKSA ensures compliance with ISA 570.

Public Sector Perspective

1. *The appropriateness of the use of the going concern assumption in the preparation of the financial statements is generally not in question when auditing either a central government or those public sector entities having funding arrangements backed by a central government. However, where such arrangements do not exist, or where central government funding of the entity may be withdrawn and the existence of the entity may be at risk, this HKSA will provide useful guidance. As governments corporatize and privatize government entities, going concern issues will become increasingly relevant to the public sector.*