

Appeal & Review

Standard Operating Procedure

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1 Purpose

This Standard Operating Procedure which is based on the ISO 17065 guidelines, outlines the principles and responsibilities with regards to appeals and review requests.

Furthermore, it describes the process for handling appeals and reviews.

2 Application

This Standard Operating Procedure applies to all parties that are involved in the process, including the concerned FLOCERT customer, FLOCERT Credibility Assurance Unit and any other concerned FLOCERT staff member.

3 Definitions

Review

An official request by the customer to review an Evaluation Decision or a financial penalty as a result of a non-conformity.

It is also defined as review if the criteria affected by the request would not alter a Certification decision.

Reviews are decided by the Review Committee.

The following decisions are considered Evaluation Decisions:

- To confirm non-conformities identified during an audit
- Whether or not to accept the corrective measures proposed by the customer
- Whether or not the objective evidence submitted by the customer brings them into compliance with the Fairtrade Standards
- To issue a financial sanction

The Review Process is open to Fairtrade customers.

Appeal

An official request by the customer to revoke or reverse a Certification Decision.

Appeals are decided by the Appeals Committee.

The following decisions are considered Certification Decisions:

- To deny or withdraw a Permission to Trade from a producer or trader
- To suspend or lift the suspension of a certificate.
- To decertify customers¹
- To issue a moratorium for re-entry

The Appeals Process is open to Fairtrade and EDGE customers.

Appeal Committee – Review Committee

An internal quality control body that objectively supervises the decision-making process carried out within FLOCERT. Thus, it is responsible for guaranteeing a consistent interpretation of the Standards and for ensuring that operations are carried out with due diligence and impartiality. As a company-internal body, its role is neither that of an external and/or official arbitration/mediation body nor a court-like institution.

¹ Requests by customers to review decertification due non-payment of fees, will be treated according to the CA Complaints SOP

Competences of the committee members

The committee member selection process must ensure that the below listed aspects are fully considered. By ensuring that individuals possess the necessary skills and attributes FLOCERT will guarantee that the interests of the complainant's organization are effectively represented during the appeal and review process.

Committee members must be capable of clearly expressing their professional expertise and conclusion based on it while remaining open to differing viewpoints from fellow members. They must be able to analyse and evaluate appeals and reviews and to provide meaningful input to the decision-making process.

Therefore, they must possess the following competencies, skills, and personal attributes:

- Ability to constructively review decisions made by certification staff and determine if they were fair, consistent, and based on the prevailing Fairtrade Standard, FLOCERT's procedures, and the certification agreement.
- Evidence Assessment: committee members must carefully consider all evidence presented, including documentation and testimony, to form a well-reasoned opinion.
- Interpretation of Regulations: Committee members need a strong understanding of the relevant regulations, Fairtrade Standards, FLOCERT's procedures, and the certification agreement to apply them correctly in each case.
- Willingness to seek clarification when there are gaps in understanding
- Effective communication skills
- Strong customer orientation
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Impartiality and fairness in judgment
- Confidentiality: Maintaining confidentiality of sensitive information is paramount

4 Confidentiality

All submitted Appeal or Review request are treated confidential. The information provided by the appellant will only be used for the purpose of this procedure.

FLOCERT will disclose the audit results and other case relevant information only to FLOCERT staff on a need-to-know basis.

Response letters are a work product of FLOCERT. They may not be distributed, copied or published without FLOCERT's prior written consent.

5 Process

5.1 Submission

A request for Appeal or Review may be submitted:

- For Fairtrade customers: up to 14 calendar days after receipt of the Certification Decision, Evaluation Decision or date of invoice (for financial sanctions).
- For EDGE customers: up to 30 days from receipt of the final audit report.

If no Appeal or Review request is received within this timeframe, the decision becomes final and may not be reviewed or appealed against.

An Appeal or Review request does not alter the effectiveness of the Certification or Evaluation decision, until the Appeal/Review is granted by the relevant committee in its final decision (if it is). All restrictions applicable to a customer as a consequence of a Certification Decision remain in effect during the period of the appeal or review, regardless of the outcome thereof. The certification workflow is stopped, until the end of the appeal or review process and no additional documents should be uploaded to Intact Platform until a final decision is communicated.

To file an Appeal or request a Review, the affected customer submits the corresponding documentation to the Credibility Assurance Unit at FLOCERT. The form must identify the number of the appealed compliance criteria. Each appealed criteria must have a specific justification why the original decision should be reviewed by the respective committee. The submission form must include a brief summary explaining the main reasons for disagreement.

Fairtrade customers submit an appeal or review request:

- By sending the completed form **CA AppealReview FO** to the email address credibility@flocert.net. The form can be requested from the responsible FLOCERT analyst or from Credibility Assurance Unit using the email address above, or
- By filling the online form available on FLOCERT website (www.flocert.net).
- Via telephone or any other communication means only where writing communications is not possible. The oral communication can take place using the phone number available on the official website.

EDGE customers submit a notice of appeal to the email address credibility@flocert.net, which sets out clearly and precisely the basis of the appeal. Besides, the appellant should support any allegations made in the appeal with as much relevant and objective evidence as possible. The notice of appeal shall:

- Identify the alleged errors in the audit findings and/or certification decision or conclusions.
- Explain in sufficient detail why it is claimed that the alleged errors made a material difference to the outcome of the audit or the fairness of the audit process.
- Explain in detail how the certification body or its auditor/s failed to follow the EDGE requirements such that this substantially impaired the findings and/or certification decision/ conclusions.

All requests for appeals and reviews must clearly state the reason(s) for disagreement with a certification or evaluation decision and need to be supported by information and evidence. Please note that an Appeal or request for Review will only be accepted by the Credibility Assurance unit if it is accompanied by or based on clear and credible information.

Reasons for requests may include, but are not limited to:

- Decisions based on irrelevant information, or information for which there is no credible basis. In general, hearsay is treated as information for which there is no credible basis;
- Failure to consider presented, relevant information in reaching a decision;
- Reasonable perception of bias against the appellant;
- Unreasonable delay in the decision-making process;
- Prejudicial procedural irregularities in reaching the decision;
- Disputes about facts relevant to the decision;
- Disputes about interpretations relevant to the decision.

During an appeal/review, only information which existed and was presented at the time the decision was made will be considered. Additional credible information presented and accepted during an appeal/review, which was not present at the time the original decision was taken, will not be used in the appeal/review process but passed on to the Operations Department to take this information into account in the further certification process, following the appeal/review, when applicable.

5.2 Confirmation

FLOCERT's Credibility Assurance Unit will conduct an initial evaluation of the request and within 7 calendar days confirm receipt and inform the submitting party whether or not the submission contains an actionable Review or Appeal, or if the request should be dealt with according to a different procedure such as the Complaint Procedure.

Credibility Assurance maintains a log of all Appeals and requests for Review.

5.3 Investigation

Appeals Committee

The composition of the Appeal Committee is the following:

- At least two Managers with at least three years of Fairtrade Certification knowledge
- A certification expert from the Assurance Scheme Unit

Three members constitute a valid quorum for Appeal Committee meetings. The Regional Manager and the certification managers whose region are affected by the Appeal are excluded from the Appeal Committee in order to avoid any conflict of interest.

Should a member of the Appeal Committee resign or cease to be a member, the Credibility Assurance Manager will nominate a replacement in line with the above criteria.

A representative of the Legal Department attends as an observer. The Credibility Assurance Unit acts as moderator and documents the following details in the summary tab in Freshdesk:

- Date of committee meeting
- Attendees (full name, role, position)
- Final decision taken

Details of the decision of the committee will be specified in the response letter to the appellant. The Appeal Committee shall make decisions on presented cases through consensus; failing consensus, further information is required and evaluated until a consensus is achieved..

Review Committee

The committee is comprised of four FLOCERT certifiers (one per region) whose responsibility is to decide on the validity of the review.

The person responsible for the evaluation decision under review explains the reasoning of the decision including outlining the impact and potential consequences.

The committee member whose region is affected by the review is excluded from the decision making in order to avoid any conflict of interest.

The Credibility Assurance Unit acts as facilitator and documents the following details in the summary tab in Freshdesk:

- Date of committee meeting
- Attendees (full name, role, position)
- Final decision taken

Details of the decision of the committee will be specified in the response letter to the requester.

The Review Committee shall make decisions on presented cases through consensus; failing consensus, further information is required and evaluated until a consensus is achieved.

As there are at least two certifiers per region, the responsibilities can alternate every year: one certifier attends the Review committee meetings for a full year and then another certifier of the same region attends for the following year. This is optional and up to the certifiers. In case a certifier is unable to attend a committee meeting during his regular “year of duty”, the certifier of the same region will back him/her up.

5.4 Decision and response

The Appeal or Review Committee will make a decision within 35 calendar days after the formal confirmation of receipt of the request is made to the customer.

This decision will be explained in detail for each criterion appealed against or reviewed in the response letter.

A decision can have the following outcomes:

- **Original decision overturned:** The decision being appealed against or reviewed will be changed by the Operations Department. The effect of this changed decision is explained to the appellant along with the communication of the decision.

- **Original decision confirmed:** The decision being appealed against or reviewed is confirmed and will not be changed. The Appeal/Review Committee will advise the Operations Department should any deadlines of the consecutive certification workflow need to be extended due to the proceedings of the appeal/review.
- **Original decision partially confirmed:** The decision being appealed against or reviewed is partially confirmed. This is mainly the case when there is more than one criterion being appealed against or reviewed e.g., one non-conformity could be confirmed, and one non-conformity could be overturned.

5.5 Appeals against decisions

A request for Appeals against decisions made by the Review Committee may be submitted up to 14 calendar days after receipt of the Review response letter or the subsequent Evaluation Decision - depending on the nature of the decision taken by the Review Committee.

Appeals will be heard by the Appeal Committee only if:

- The appellant can demonstrate that a final certification decision has been made; and,
- The appellant can indicate reasonable grounds highlighting why the Appeal Committee could come to a different conclusion on the same facts the Review Committee was confronted with

Appeals against decisions made by the Review Committee are not automatically heard and all requests for such appeals are evaluated according to the criteria mentioned above. Only when the Appeal Committee is convinced that these criteria apply will the appeal be heard. Please note also that a decision taken by the Appeal Committee is final and that no Appeal will be accepted to this decision.

6 References

- CA Complaints SOP
- CA AppealReview WI
- CA AppealReview FO