



SECTION 12 PUBLIC INQUIRIES AND OFFICIAL COMPLAINTS

October 7, 2021

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Introduction

A process that openly investigates concerns and official complaints is an important component of any legitimate certification *program*. The transparency requirements of the *SFI 2022 Standards* and supporting documents allow individuals and organizations to bring forward questions and concerns using two different processes as outlined in this section.

The “Public Inquiries Regarding Inconsistent Practices” (number 1 below) shall be used for general inquiries from the public and to promptly review and apply corrective actions, if warranted, in situations where isolated deficiencies in implementing the requirements of the *SFI 2022 Forest Management*, *SFI 2022 Fiber Sourcing*, *SFI 2022 Chain-of-Custody*, or *SFI 2022 Certified Sourcing Standards* may have occurred.

Inquiries that involve multiple or systemic instances of alleged nonconformity that challenge the validity of a certification shall be addressed using the process outlined in “Official Complaints Questioning the Validity of a Certification” (number 2 below).

In instances where there is disagreement on the process to be applied, *SFI Inc.* shall serve as the higher authority in determining which process is most appropriate.

1. Public Inquiries regarding Inconsistent Practices against the *SFI 2022 Forest Management Standard* or *SFI 2022 Fiber Sourcing Standard*

Any individual or organization (the complainant) with information or claims about a *Certified Organization's* individual *practices* that may be in nonconformity may seek to have those claims investigated.

The complainant shall present specific claim(s) of inconsistent *practice* in writing and in sufficient detail to the *Certified Organization*. Within 45 days of receipt of the claim of inconsistent *practice*, the *Certified Organization* shall respond to the complainant and forward a copy of the claim of inconsistent practice and its response to their *certification body* for review at the next audit.

The *certification body* shall investigate the validity of the inconsistent practice report and the *Certified Organization's* response and resolution of the claim at the time of the next scheduled audit. Once the certification body has completed its investigation of the inconsistent practice report it shall communicate its findings to the complainant and the certified organization.

In the event litigation is involved between the complainant and *Certified Organization*, the inconsistent *practices* process shall be suspended pending resolution of the litigation. It shall be re-started following resolution of the litigation if *SFI* nonconformity issues remain.

2. Official Complaints Questioning the Validity of a Certification to *SFI* Sections 2, 3, 4, and 5

The official complaint process is an important component of any legitimate certification program, including *SFI*. The official complaint process allows individuals or organizations to have their complaint regarding the validity of a certification openly and independently investigated. A complaint does not challenge the credibility or the content of the *SFI 2022 Standards*, rather it challenges the audit findings and the decision to grant the certification, or events that have happened since the last audit that questions the maintenance of the certification.

2.1 Official Complaint Process

- 2.1.1** The complainant communicates their concerns and in sufficient detail to the *to the Certified Organization and the Certified Organization's certification body*.
- 2.1.2** For complaints regarding a *SFI 2022 Chain-of-Custody Standard Certified Organization*, the *Certified Organization* and the *certification body* shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 10 working days. The *certification body* may request additional specifics associated with the concerns and will investigate the issue in accordance with their official complaint procedures that were approved by their accreditation body.
- 2.1.3** If the *certification body* finds a sound basis for the official complaint then it shall require the *Certified Organization* to take corrective action to address the complaint and advise the complainant accordingly.
- 2.1.4** If the *certification body* does not find a sound basis for the complaint and determines the certification was appropriately granted and *Certified Organization's* performance has not changed since the certification, it would inform the complainant of this.
- 2.1.5** If the findings of the *certification body* do not satisfy the complainant they can bring their complaint to the accreditation body that accredited the *certification body* for investigation ([ANSI National Accreditation Body](#) or the [Standards Council of Canada](#)). The accreditation body would then conduct its own investigation into the complaint as the highest authority.
- 2.1.6** In the event litigation is involved between the complainant and the *Certified Organization*, the complaint process shall be suspended pending resolution of the litigation. It shall be re-started following resolution of the litigation if *SFI* nonconformity issues remain.

3. Challenges or Complaints regarding *SFI* On-Product Label Use (Section 6)

Any party with information or claims about the *practices* of a *Certified Organization*, or questions about the validity of a *Certified Organization's* label use in accordance with the requirements of *SFI* Section 6 — Rules for Use of the *SFI On-Product Labels and Off-Product Marks* may seek to have those claims investigated by contacting the *SFI Office of Label Use and Licensing*. Complaints will be addressed by the *SFI Office of Label Use and Licensing* within 45 days.

Upon reviewing the information, the *SFI Office of Label Use and Licensing* may:

- a. seek more information from the complainant or the *Certified Organization* before making a final determination; or
- b. find that the complaint is without merit and no further action is required; or
- c. find that corrective actions are necessary; or
- d. if the *Certified Organization* fails to take appropriate corrective measures or if no action would be sufficient to remedy the situation, suspend the label license.