



Frequently Asked Questions: Certification Accommodation Policy due to Coronavirus

Fair Trade USA®

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ) related to the Fair Trade USA Certification Accommodation Policy due to Coronavirus specifically as it applies to the APS and CFS programs. Under this policy, Fair Trade USA has temporarily suspended on site audits due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fair Trade USA reserves the right to review and modify the content of this FAQ as needed in the face of this evolving crisis.

Scope and Applicability

This FAQ applies to Current Certificate Holders under the APS and CFS programs. It does not apply to new applicants for Certification and it does not apply to the Trade or Factory program.

If Certificate Holders have additional questions about the audit process, please contact your CAB for more details.

Related Documents

Fair Trade USA Certification Accommodation Policy due to Coronavirus

1. How will annual audits be conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic?

During the Covid-19 pandemic, annual audits are being replaced with a two-part process: a remote desk review followed by an on-site assessment to take place at a future time, once it is safe for auditors to return to on-site auditing.

Compliance Assessment Bodies (CABs) will contact Certificate Holders whose annual audits are due (normally this is aligned with the annual harvest cycle) to schedule the first part of this process, which is a desk review. Preliminary results from the desk review will be shared with the Certificate Holder. Once conditions have improved and it is once again possible to conduct on-site activities, the CAB will contact Certificate Holders again to schedule the second part of this process.



2. If an annual audit was already scheduled, and was cancelled due to the pandemic, what will happen?

The CAB will contact the Certificate Holder to reschedule the audit following the two-part process as described above.

3. What do Certificate Holders have to do?

Certificate Holders should respond to their CABs about scheduling the remote desk audit. The on-site stage of the audit will be scheduled at a later date, after the restrictions have been lifted.

4. How much time will be needed to conduct each stage of the audit process?

Generally, the total audit duration including both parts combined will be similar to the length of a normal annual audit. The total duration might be slightly longer depending on the particular circumstances of the Certificate Holder, but generally not by more than around 20%. CABs will calculate the amount of time from the total audit duration that will be used to conduct the desk review, and the amount of time that will be used for the future on site audit.

5. Will there be any change to the cost of the audit?

The overall cost of the audit will be mainly affected by the total number of audit days (see above).

6. What should Certificate Holders do if it is not possible to conduct the remote desk audit at this time?

CABs will provide flexibility on scheduling the remote desk audit considering any challenges that Certificate Holders may be experiencing due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Specific reasons to justify postponing the remote desk audit should be provided to the CAB.

7. When will the on-site portion of the audit take place?

This is unclear, as it will depend on developments with the global pandemic. Fair Trade USA is monitoring the global situation and will lift the restrictions on conducting on-site audits once it is safe to proceed with scheduling these again. The safety of all our stakeholders is of utmost importance.

If for reasons related to the pandemic it is still not possible for CABs to conduct the on-site portion of the audit after 60 days of completion of the desk review phase, then the CAB will inform the Certificate Holder of the next steps required in order to complete the annual audit process. This will include any additional remote assessment needed to finalize the audit report and issue non-compliances. An additional follow-up audit, which may be announced or unannounced, will take place at a later time in the year once it is safe for the on-site activities to resume.



8. Which parts of the standard will be checked in the remote desk review?

The CAB will prepare an audit plan based on which aspects of the FTUSA standard can be checked through a desk review, and which parts will require verification through an on-site audit. The CAB will provide guidance to the auditee on what to prepare for each stage of the audit. In general, Certificate Holders should be prepared to be assessed on all aspects of the standard and to include all sites within the scope of the certificate in the assessment.

9. What should be done if compliance related activities such as meetings of the FTC, the General Assembly, trainings, etc. cannot be completed either related to the audit or to CAPs?

CABs will raise a non-compliance related to any criteria that are not fulfilled during the audit. However, more flexibility will be given to close these non-conformities considering that the reason given for these situations is related to Covid-19. Certificate Holders should as a general practice always inform auditors transparently about any difficulties in complying with the standard, indicating any activities that are postponed or cancelled, and sharing any documentary evidence for related actions and/or communications. Flexibility will be provided to close these non-compliances with contingencies, which means that a plan may be put in place and implementation checked in the next audit.

10. How will CAPs be managed after the remote desk audit?

CABs will hold an opening and closing meeting as part of the remote desk audit and provide a preliminary Non-Compliance Report based on the results of this first stage of the audit. However, the Certificate Holder will not be required to begin working on a CAP until the second on-site part of the audit has been completed at a future date.

11. What happens if there aren't the minimum number of workers when on site audits can resume?

Under normal circumstances, audits are conducted when a minimum of 50% of the workforce is present, typically during the peak harvest season. Due to the Coronavirus situation, this requirement will be waived and CABs will determine feasibility of proceeding with the on site audit outside of the peak harvest season.

12. What will happen to suspended Certificate Holders?

If lifting suspension requires an on-site audit, and/or any corrective actions to lift the suspension that cannot be completed (with justification) during the pandemic, then the suspension will remain in place until after these conditions have changed. If the nature of non-conformities leading to the suspension are such that a desk review by the CAB is sufficient to lift the suspension, then the suspension may be resolved with a follow-up audit to be scheduled at a later date.

