



# Frequently Asked Questions: Certification Accommodation Policy due to Coronavirus

Fair Trade USA®

## Purpose

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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. In March 2020, Fair Trade USA temporarily suspended onsite audits due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Beginning in July 2020, Fair Trade USA began a gradual return to onsite audits considering several risk factors as described in the policy.

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

## Scope and Applicability

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This FAQ applies to Current Certificate Holders and applicants under the APS and CFS programs. 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.

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

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During the Covid-19 pandemic, annual audits may happen in one of two ways:

- Onsite audit in any country or location where Fair Trade USA and the Compliance Assessment Bodies (CAB) have deemed safe based on a risk assessment
- Hybrid/two-part audit which is comprised of a remote assessment followed by an onsite assessment to take place at a future time, once it is safe for auditors to resume to onsite auditing

For hybrid audits, CABs will contact current Certificate Holders to schedule a remote assessment. Results from the review will be shared with the Certificate Holder. CABs then have 60 days after the completion of the desk review to determine if they are able to proceed to an onsite audit. If an onsite visit is not possible, the CAB will inform the Certificate Holder of the next steps required in order to complete the annual audit process. An additional follow-up audit, which may be announced or unannounced, will take place at a later time.



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

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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?

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Certificate Holders should respond to their CABs about scheduling the audit. If the audit is proceeding as a two-part hybrid audit as described above, the onsite stage may 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?

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Timing will be determined by the CAB and the Certificate Holder. Generally, for new applicants seeking certification, once an application is submitted, CABs have two weeks to respond to begin scheduling, however communication often begins sooner. It generally takes one to six months to schedule an initial audit. The process may be expedited if an applicant is both motivated and organized to begin right away. Overall, Fair Trade USA is finding that hybrid audits take at least two months longer to implement given that it is a multi-step process.

## 5. Will there be any change to the cost of the audit for an onsite vs hybrid audit?

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The overall cost of the audit will be affected by the total number of audit days and travel costs, which are calculated by the CAB. Please discuss options with your CAB.

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

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All Certificate Holders are required to complete an annual audit either as an onsite audit or as a hybrid audit. CABs will provide flexibility on scheduling the audit considering any challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Certificate Holders should provide justification to the CAB if an annual audit must be delayed..

## 7. When will the onsite portion of the audit take place?

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This will depend on safety conditions of where the audit will take place. Beginning in October 2020, CABs will assess the safety conditions necessary to proceed with conducting onsite audits and will inform the Certificate Holder if an onsite audit is possible.



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

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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 onsite 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?

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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-compliances if they are related to Covid-19. Certificate Holders should always inform auditors about any difficulties in complying with the standard, including indicating any activities that are postponed/cancelled and sharing documentary evidence for related actions and/or communications. Flexibility will be provided to close these non-compliances with contingencies, which means that a plan must be put in place and submitted to the CAB with implementation checked in the next audit.

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

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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 onsite part of the audit has been completed.

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

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Under normal circumstances, audits are conducted when a minimum of 50% of the workforce is present, typically during the peak harvest season. Due to Covid-19, this requirement will be waived and CABs will determine feasibility of proceeding with the onsite audit outside of the peak harvest season.

## 12. What will happen to suspended Certificate Holders?

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If lifting suspension requires an onsite audit and/or any corrective actions that cannot be completed during the pandemic, then the suspension will remain in place. 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.



## 13. What changes have come into effect since the policy was initially published?

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Since the first version of the policy was published, the following changes have taken effect:

- a) Due to the ongoing nature of the pandemic, the policy is no longer updated monthly. It now applies until further notice.
- b) Initially the policy put all applications on hold. It now allows for initial applications to move forward to proceed with new audits for certification.
- c) The onsite portion of the hybrid audit will take place once the CAB has determined that it is safe to proceed (see Question 7 above). CABs will complete a risk assessment and follow a decision tree which considers factors such as transmission risk, possibility of travel to the sites, any restrictions such as quarantine, transportation, health infrastructure and safety measures.

