



**Public Inquiries and Official Complaints
(Section 12)**

May 1, 2020

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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* Standard 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, Fiber Sourcing, Chain of Custody, 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

Any party 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 via surveillance or certification audits. The *certification body* shall investigate the validity of the inconsistent practice and the *Certified Organization's* response and resolution of the claim at the time of the next scheduled surveillance audit.

A complainant who believes the issue has not been satisfactorily resolved may provide its original documentation and the response from the *Certified Organization* to the appropriate *SFI Implementation Committee Inconsistent Practices Program*, which shall investigate and respond to the claim of inconsistent practice(s) within 45 days of receipt of documentation. The *SFI Implementation Committee* shall provide copies of its findings and any recommended actions to both the *Certified Organization* and the complainant. The *Certified Organization* shall forward the results of the *SFI Implementation Committee* investigation to its *certification body*.

In the event litigation is involved between the external party 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 or 3

The official complaint process is an important component of any legitimate certification *program*, including the *SFI program*. 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 outlines their concerns in a letter to the *Certified Organization's certification body*.
- 2.1.2** 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 would 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 then they can appeal to the accreditation body that accredited the *certification body*, which is either ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Body (www.anab.org) or the Standards Council of Canada (www.scc.ca). 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 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.