



PEFC Council

ICC Building C
Route de Pré-Bois 20
1215 Geneva 15
Switzerland

Sustainable Forest Management auditing of PEFC certified entities affected by restrictions due to COVID-19 – guidance

Version 1 (04/09/2020)

Background

Due to the spread of COVID-19 worldwide, travel and medical restrictions are affecting auditing activities. In order to give some flexibility to certification bodies and certified entities affected by the disease, PEFC is issuing the following guidance.

The main methods to ease the consequences of travel restrictions are the implementation of remote audits, and where this is not sufficient, the extension of time periods affecting the certificate. This guidance is based on IAF Informative Document on the Management of Extraordinary Events or Circumstances Affecting ABs, CABs and Certified Organizations (IAF ID 3: 2011 - Issue 1) and IAF Mandatory Document for the Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Auditing/Assessment Purposes (IAF MD 4:2018 - Issue 2).

Guidance

1 General procedures for the application of the specific rules of this guidance

- A. The certification body should establish a documented policy and process, outlining the steps it intends to take in case that a certified organization is affected by the COVID-19 event. The policy and process shall cover the affected organization, either an individually certified entity or a certified group organisation.
- B. This documented policy and process should include an assessment of the risks of continuing certification.
- C. Each case should be evaluated and documented by the certification body to provide evidence whether, and to what extent, the certified organization is affected by the COVID-19 event.
- D. The certification body also needs to consider the risks related to cases where planning/conducting of the audit is not practicable because reaching the organization's premises may be difficult or inadvisable for the auditor (e.g. restrictions because of national or local rules, health risks, flight cancellations, etc.)
- E. These dispositions only apply to organisations which are affected by the COVID-19 event, according to the evaluation conducted by the certification body. They do not apply in any other case.

2 Initial and re-certification audits

- A. Initial and recertification audits shall not be replaced by remote audits.
- B. If a re-certification audit cannot be carried out the validity of certificates may be extended by a period of no more than 12 months, which should then be reviewed as the 12 month period comes to an end, based on the current travel and medical advice. If the validity of the certificate is extended by more than three months (based on the original validity of the certificate), another surveillance audit needs to be carried out.
As soon as travel and medical restrictions are lifted, audits shall be conducted as per the applicable standard and any other applicable procedures. For any recertification audit which does not take place once the travel restrictions have been lifted, the certificate shall be suspended.

3 Surveillance audits

- A. Surveillance audits planned for 2020 can be re-scheduled until the end of 2020.

4 Internal monitoring programme for group organisations

- A. The annual internal monitoring programme in a group organisation can be re-scheduled until the end of 2020.

5 Informing PEFC

- A. The certification body shall immediately inform PEFC of any changes affecting a certificate.