GUTcert Audit and Certification Process

for Product Certification in accordance with ISO 17065 and, accordingly, for Sustainability Certification in accordance with ISCC, REDcert, SURE and CertifHy

GUT Certifizierungsgesellschaft
für Managementsysteme mbH
Umweltgutachter
Chief Executive Officer:
Prof. Dr.-Ing. Jan Uwe Lieback
AFNOR Group

Eichenstraße 3b
12435 Berlin
Tel.: +49 30 2332021 - 0
Fax: +49 30 2332021 - 39
info@gut-cert.de
www.gut-cert.de

Limited liability company, registered office in Berlin
Commercial Register:
Amtsgericht Charlottenburg
HRB 64544
VAT ID no. DE 190888348

GLS BANK:
IBAN DE04 4306 0967 1316 1823 00
BIC GENODEM1GLS
Postbank Berlin:
IBAN DE62 1001 0010 0496 3301 03
BIC PBNKDEFF

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1 Principles of GUTcert certification

Product certification begins with an initial audit and, depending on the product norm, includes specifically defined surveillance audits and recertifications, whereby beside the management system of the commissioning organisation is also included in the assessment alongside the product.

Recertification marks the start of a new certification cycle. Surveillance audits determine the extent to which the product, the organisation and its management system continue to meet the requirements of the product standard. Furthermore, the auditors work with the organisation to identify potential for improvement regarding the management system and product performance. Only auditors with a high level of technical and methodical expertise are deployed for this purpose. The audit team

- audits the management system and the product and verifies its compliance with the client's internal processes,
- determines whether the processes and procedures have been effectively introduced, implemented and maintained, and whether the objectives and specifications/requirements are being pursued, and
- verifies compliance with the normative requirements.

Special features of the GUTcert certification process:

- Organisations receive individual support in preparing for and carrying out the procedure; enquiries are responded to promptly.
- An organisation is regarded as a partner. The aim of the audit is to improve the organisation's business processes in a sustainable manner.
- Standards represent the collective expertise of specialists. GUTcert's auditors apply these only after considering the individual circumstances of each client.
- GUTcert staff possess a high level of skill and technical expertise to implement these principles.

The individual handling of quotations, the thorough preparation of auditors to make effective use of time during on-site audits, and the constant personal availability of auditors and staff at the certification body are key prerequisites for achieving these objectives.

Note: GUTcert is, amongst other things, an accredited certification body for the aforementioned systems, an environmental verification body for audits under EMAS, a technical surveillance authority for certifications under the EfbV, and competent body for the admission of providers and measures under the AZAV. However, in all further general GUTcert documents, the general term "certification body" is used for the sake of readability.

2 Certification / issue of certificate

2.1 Preparation of the audit

Data collection
When an organisation contacts GUTcert, it is sent a form for the initial data collection with a request to provide some basic information. To speed up the process, this data collection may also be carried out by telephone or via the internet.

Preparation of an offer
Based on the basic data, GUTcert prepares an individual offer setting out the conditions for certification. The audit programme is determined taking into consideration the size of the organisation, the scope of application and the complexity of the management system, the products and the processes, the stated level of product effectiveness, and the results of previous audits. In the client's best interests, every opportunity to reduce the audit duration is utilised.

If the company confirms the offer and places an order on this basis, a preferred date for the audit may be specified at this stage. GUTcert may review the offer following an initial document review and modify it if necessary.

Conclusion of contract, selection of auditors
Once the contract has been awarded (certification contract), GUTcert assembles an audit team from its pool of auditors. The organisation has the right to reject the auditors nominated by GUTcert. In this case, GUTcert will appoint a new audit team.

To facilitate better preparation for the certification process, the organisation is provided with a list of documents to be prepared and the relevant system checklist. The audit leader prepares a detailed audit plan.

Auditors are appointed on the basis of their technical expertise in the relevant sectors and receive regular training on current issues relating to quality, environmental, energy and occupational health and safety management, as well as on the content of international standards.

Both auditors and verifiers are subject to strict impartiality, and. for this reason, may not consultancy services to the organisation in question for a period of two years before and after certification. The term consultancy covers any form of involvement in the establishment, implementation or maintenance of a management system and/or product. This also includes the conduct of internal audits. Trainings and seminars also fall under the term consultancy if company-specific solutions are offered. Auditors are bound to maintain absolute confidentiality regarding information obtained in the course of their work.

Should an external body need to be commissioned as part of a project, GUTcert retains full responsibility for the work to be carried out and will maintain its responsibility for the granting, maintenance, extension, suspension and withdrawal of certification. Furthermore, GUTcert ensures that the appointed body is competent to meet the applicable requirements of this and other standards and guidelines relating to testing, inspection or other technical activities, and is not involved, either

directly or through its employer, in the development or manufacture of the products in a manner that could compromise impartiality. Subcontracting is only permitted with the applicant's consent.

2.2 Certification procedure/assessment

Audit preparation
Audit preparation always includes a review of the product and management system documentation. The organisation will receive a detailed list of the minimum documentation required.

By the time of audit preparation, the key documents relating to the product, a management system manual for the organisation and approval of the auditors proposed by GUTcert should be available. The product and management system documentation normally comprises the Management Manual in which the product to be audited is also integrated. Additional documents such as work instructions or forms that are necessary for understanding the entire system or product should also be submitted (see also the detailed information on the GUTcert website).

The audit preparation serves to assess the client's status and their understanding of the standard requirements. Any missing documents or those additionally required by the auditor will be requested.

This stage does not require on-site verification. The organisation's readiness for the on-site audit and the necessary resources are assessed. A document review report is not required. However, a report can be prepared for the organisation upon request; this does, however, require an adjustment to the scope of work.

This is followed by consultation with the client regarding the on-site audit, for which key focus areas are identified.

Usually, the on-site audit can be carried out at the organisation's premises at the agreed time (maximum period of six months between audit preparation and the on-site audit). If major gaps or non-conformities are identified following audit preparation, these are communicated to the organisation. If necessary, it may then be advisable or necessary to postpone the on-site audit to give the organisation the opportunity to rectify non-conformities and close gaps.

On-site audit
Following the arrangement of a date, the audit team conducts the on-site audit at the site(s) in accordance with the organisation's audit programme, based on audit criteria and documentation for system audits. The procedure follows the specifications of ISO 19011 and begins with an opening meeting, followed by interviews with management and staff, on-site visits, the observation of activities and conditions, and documentation review to gather evidence of compliance with all standard requirements.

During the debriefing, the lead auditor/verifier provides those responsible with a verbal interim report to inform them of the status of the product's certification. If non-conformities are identified, the organisation is given the opportunity to define measures to corrects the non-conformity by a deadline specified in the non-conformity report. The successful implementation of these measures must be confirmed by the auditor/verifier, either through the review of subsequently submitted

documentation or by means of an on-site follow-up audit, before the certification process can continue. Non-conformities are checked for effective correction during the next audit.

2.3 Certification decision / issue of certificate:

Within ten working days, the lead auditor/verifier shall prepare an audit report containing all the results of the assessment. In the event of certification, the final decision on the issue of a certificate rests with the Certification Committee. Upon successful review of the entire certification process, the Committee issues the certificate. The multi-stage certification decision process is conducted in accordance with the requirements of ISO 17065.

The certificate issued is valid from the date of the certification decision in accordance with the product standard. Alternatively, the start date of the certificate's validity may be specified individually in the certification decision.

Certificates are available in DIN A3 and DIN A4 formats and in various languages, where permitted by the product standard. The certification status is made publicly available.

2.4 Certification mark

The use of the certificate and the certification mark forms part of the certification contract concluded with the company and is governed by GUTcert's certification regulations. In accordance with these conditions, organisations certified by GUTcert may use the certification mark free of charge. They are entitled to display this mark on letters, brochures and information materials for promotional and branding purposes.

3 Maintenance of certification

3.1 Surveillance audits

In the case of product certification, surveillance audits may be conducted after a certificate has been issued, depending on product requirements. The intervals are based on the applicable product standard. The surveillance audit does not cover the full range of the initial audit, but is limited to the essential features which ensure the functionality of the product and the management system, such as

- internal audits and product and management review,
- handling of complaints, grievances and incidents,
- assessments of modifications,
- progress in terms of continuous improvement (including the correction of recommendations from previous audits) and
- changes to the product and or product quality.

The procedure otherwise corresponds to the conduct of a certification process.

The conclusion of the certification contract covers a comprehensive mandate for both the certification audit and the surveillance audits. Invoicing for the corresponding follow-up audits takes place only after services have been rendered by GUTcert.

3.2 Transfer of existing certificates

A change of the certification body is also possible within the validity period of a certificate. The assessment of the certification and the issue of the certificate are carried out in accordance with the provisions of the relevant IAF guideline.

4 Recertification

The validity period of a certificate is determined by the product standard. A recertification audit is required before the certificate expires. The procedure essentially follows that for initial certification. Mainly a verification of the current documentation is carried out. During the on-site recertification audit, the ongoing conformity and effectiveness of the product are assessed, and the continued relevance and applicability of the defined scope of certification are confirmed. Previous audit reports are used for this assessment. In addition, the relevant areas of the management system and the product are inspected.

5 Extension of the scope of application

An extension of the scope of application may take place in conjunction with a surveillance audit or as a separate audit. Upon receipt of the request, the organisation first receives a detailed list of the minimum documentation to be submitted. This is reviewed by the auditor/verifier, who then informs the organisation of any necessary measures. An additional audit may be required. The organisation will ultimately receive a new certificate.

6 Suspension, restriction and withdrawal of certificates

If the conditions for the validity of a certificate are no longer met, the certification body must take measures to prevent the use of this certificate or to ensure, where appropriate, compliance with the certification requirements.

Procedures for the suspension or withdrawal of certificates are documented. The status of each certificate is made publicly available.

6.1 Suspension

A suspension may be imposed if

- the specified timeframe for completing the review process is exceeded, or
- the organisation’s certified product fails to meet the requirements even after the specified deadline for corrective action has expired, or
- surveillance or recertification audits are not carried out at the required frequency or are not permitted, or

- a suspension is requested voluntarily.

A suspension may be imposed for a maximum period of six months. A surveillance audit shall be carried out for reinstatement. Upon successful completion of the review procedure, the suspension is lifted and the existing certificate shall become valid again. If the issues leading to a suspension have not been resolved within the specified period, this may result in the withdrawal or restriction of the certificate's scope of application.

6.2 Restriction of the scope of application

If the requirements for part of a certificate's scope of application are not met on a permanent basis, the scope of the certificate may be restricted by the certification body.

6.3 Withdrawal

The certification body must withdraw a certificate if

- a suspension of a certificate cannot be lifted by the deadline, or
- the organisation voluntarily wishes to discontinue certification, or
- the organisation ceases operations permanently and/or no longer manufactures the product.

The organisation will be requested in writing to return the certificate, to refrain from any further advertising using the certificate or the certification mark, and not to refer to an existing certification in any other way.

The head of the certification body is responsible for the withdrawal of a certificate.