



GFSI UPDATES ITS COVID-19 POSITION

08 Mars 2022

Today GFSI reviewed its position on mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on GFSI-recognised audits and certification. This amended position maintains the options available to certified organisations and those seeking certification for the first time, when full onsite audits may not be possible.

The full position can be read below. In summary,

- Certificates may be extended for a period of 6 months if the CPO considers this a suitable option for their programme and based on a risk assessment
- GFSI issued new Benchmarking Requirements Version 2020 to include the use of Information and Communication Technologies in audits
- GFSI does not currently recognise fully remote food safety audit solutions
- in the event a certificate remains at risk of lapsing, suppliers and customer(s) should agree on a protocol to assess the risk of maintaining supply chain without the verification of a GFSI-recognised audit.



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This position statement is an update to the last [COVID-19 position](#) published by GFSI on 16th October 2020.

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak continues to create uncertainty and potential for audit disruption globally. In some cases, this is leading to an impact on the certification status of certain organisations. During this ongoing period, Certification Programme Owners (CPOs) and Certification Bodies (CBs) are advised to proceed as follows:

1. Follow [IAF ID3:2011](#), “Management of Extraordinary Events or Circumstances Affecting ABs, CBs and Certified Organizations”.
2. Follow requirements stipulated by applicable national regulation to manage the COVID-19 outbreak and allow CBs to follow those requirements. If those differ from the content of this position, the regulatory requirements prevail.
3. Explore any opportunities to carry out the scheduled audit with the audited organisation, including but not restricted to, initiating the audit using Information and Communication Technologies in line with [GFSI Benchmarking Requirements version 2020.1](#), agreeing to enhanced hygiene protocols to protect employees and auditors, using auditors from regions with no or lower travel restrictions to the audited organisation’s jurisdiction.
4. Decide if and how extending certificates by 6 months may be applied to their Certification Programmes.

Please note that if the CPO decides to allow the extension of certificates under their programme, a risk assessment of the certified organisation as indicated in IAF ID3:2011 shall be carried out before granting any certificate extension.

GFSI has undertaken changes to the [GFSI Benchmarking Requirements](#) (current version, Version 2020.1) to enable the partial use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in audits against a GFSI-recognised standard. GFSI believes this provides a good deal of flexibility and support in the current crisis whilst maintaining trust and confidence in GFSI outcomes. In parallel, we continue to work towards evaluating the evidence to support the efficacy and integrity of fully remote food safety audits.

GFSI does not currently recognise fully remote food safety audit solutions. In 2020, GFSI established a [dedicated group of experts](#) to review the evidence of the efficacy and integrity of remote food safety audit solutions where they exist, with a view to feeding that evidence into ongoing review of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements



We are inviting our community to submit evidence on the efficacy and integrity of audits and assessments carried out using ICT. Please email any evidence you may have to the following address gfsinfo@theconsumergoodsforum.com

In the event a certificate remains at risk of lapsing despite the options outlined above, GFSI would advocate that suppliers and customer(s) agree on a protocol deemed acceptable to all to assess the risk of maintaining supply chain without the verification of a GFSI-recognised audit.

GFSI acknowledges that there are a range of assessment options available other than a GFSI-recognised audit when a physical visit is not possible. As they do not lead to a GFSI-recognised certificate, the suitability of those assessment options or combinations thereof to demonstrate food safety outcomes should be agreed between suppliers and customers and is not a matter for GFSI.

GFSI reviewed its COVID position on the 8th March 2021 and commits to keeping it under constant review and updating as required. Please ensure you are [subscribed](#) to receive updates and news from GFSI.



Q&A

Q: My certificate will expire soon.

A: Expiring certificates may be extended once by a maximum of six months based on a risk assessment defined by the CPOs and applied by the CBs. During that six-month period, you and your Certification Body should arrange to enable an audit as soon as conditions allow.

Q: My certificate has been extended and I foresee the possibility for a physical audit to be undertaken at some point during the extension period.

A: The audit process against a GFSI-recognised programme may be kicked off remotely in line with the [GFSI Benchmarking Requirements Version 2020.1](#).

The onsite part of the audit should be completed within 90 days of the audit start date. Providing the CB considers that the audit integrity and efficiency will not be impacted by it, the 90-day dispensation defined in Part II element 5.34.1 of the Benchmarking Requirements applies automatically to audits impacted by COVID-19.

Q: My certificate has been extended and I do not have the possibility for an audit to be undertaken during the extension period. The six-month extension period is now coming to an end. What should I do?

A: As you will not be able to complete an audit against a GFSI-recognised programme as per GFSI Benchmarking Requirements version 2020.1, you will not be certified.

GFSI would advocate that suppliers and customer(s) agree on a protocol deemed acceptable to all to assess the risk of maintaining supply chain without the verification of a GFSI-recognised audit.

GFSI acknowledges that there are a range of assessment options available other than a GFSI-recognised audit when a physical visit is not possible. As they do not lead to a GFSI-recognised certificate, the suitability of those assessment options or combinations thereof to demonstrate food safety outcomes should be agreed between suppliers and customers and is not a matter for GFSI.

Q: I could not obtain an extension of my certificate validity, and my certificate will expire. What should I do?

A: as above, GFSI would advocate that suppliers and customer(s) agree on a protocol deemed acceptable to all to assess the risk of maintaining supply chain without the verification of a GFSI-recognised audit.

GFSI acknowledges that there are a range of assessment options available other than a GFSI-recognised audit when a physical visit is not possible and therefore that assessment needs to be carried out remotely.

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Q: I am seeking GFSI-recognised certification for the first time. How does this apply to me?



A: The audit process against a GFSI recognised programme may be kicked off remotely in line with the [GFSI Benchmarking Requirements Version 2020.1](#). Providing the CB considers that the audit integrity and efficiency will not be impacted by it, the 90-day dispensation defined in Part II element 5.34.1 of the Benchmarking Requirements applies automatically to audits impacted by COVID-19.

Q: When will GFSI recognise fully remote audits?

A: GFSI is a science and evidence-based organisation and any changes to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements to recognise fully remote audits must be based on evidence that their efficacy and integrity enables food safety outcomes to be achieved. GFSI has established a dedicated group of experts to review the evidence of the efficacy and integrity of fully remote food safety audit solutions where they exist, with a view to feeding that evidence into our ongoing review of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements. To support the work of this group of experts, we are inviting our community to submit evidence on the efficacy and integrity of audits and assessments carried out using Information and Communication Technologies.