

Edition 01.2021

Quality Assurance

OEKO-TEX® Association

OEKO-TEX® – International Association for Research and Testing in the Field of Textile and Leather Ecology.



GOAL

Confidence is one of OEKO-TEX® key values. We are striving to inspire confidence in our partnership, in our methods/process and most importantly in our certifications. Therefore, we have set high quality standards for us, our partners and the articles and production sites that we certify. To ensure a continuous high level of quality we have established various control mechanisms.

INSTITUTE AUDITS

Our 18 accredited, independent textile and leather partner institutes play the most important part in our certification. Therefore, they are audited every three years by the Secretary General of OEKO-TEX® and an experienced institute employee of a different institute. The objectives of the audit are to maintain a high level of quality and to identify possible obstacles. For the audit, spot checks on the certification process from certificate base of the respective institute are performed. On the basis of these randomly selected certificates, the adequacy of the scope of testing, the On-Site Visit reports and the correct accounting of the certifications are checked. Additionally, other internal procedures agreed on within the OEKO-TEX® Association are checked. If incorrect procedures or processes are found, the institute must ensure that such deviations from the standard process do not occur again in the future. If necessary the institute is supported by the OEKO-TEX® Secretariat through targeted training measures. Serious discrepancies in the certification process lead to a withdrawal of certificates issued by incorrect processes, if the deficiency cannot be healed.

CONTROL TESTS

To make sure that the samples that are tested during the certification represent the article finally sold and that the sold article also conforms with the applicable standard, 25% of the issued STANDARD 100 and LEATHER STANDARD certificates are checked in product controls. The samples for the product controls are picked from the different production stages, different countries, and different sources. Furthermore, they are chosen to represent the different product groups, product classes and different annexes.

The control tests are comprised of a laboratory test, as well as a check of the correct usage of the label and whether the article is represented in the article scope. Non-conforming samples need to be improved. The certificate holder must prove compliance with the standards' requirements and submit a new material sample to verify the successful implementation of the requirements. In case the non-conformity cannot be improved, is repeated or the certificate holder is refusing to cooperate, the certificate is withdrawn.

ROUND ROBIN TESTS

Laboratory testing is at the core of most of the OEKO-TEX® certificates. To make sure that the performance of the laboratories of our partner institutes is comparable and that the methods are accurate, annual Round Robin Tests are carried out. The OEKO-TEX® partner institutes have to participate in this interlaboratory comparison. The Round Robin Tests provide insights into the testing performance of the laboratories. Additionally, the tests allow to check the accuracy of the test methods by measuring and evaluating several sets of the different parameters. Identical samples are tested with identical methods in different testing laboratories. The results of the tests are consolidated and presented in the Technical Meetings of the OEKO-TEX® Working Groups as well as the General Manager Meeting which is the confe-

rence of all general managers of the OEKO-TEX® partner institutes. If the results are deviating, the affected institute needs to take corrective action. Until the corrective actions have been implemented by the respective institute, it cannot perform the parameter(s) in question. While the institute cannot perform the parameter(s), it can be supported by other institutes of the association.

ON-SITE VISITS

For STANDARD 100 and LEATHER STANDARD, On-Site Visits are performed upon the first certification and afterwards every 3 years, if the certificate is renewed. The On-Site Visits serve as a basic assessment of whether the applicant is able to maintain the required quality over the long term and whether they can comply with the standards criteria. For this, the quality assurance officer familiarise themselves with the local conditions of the company and evaluate them. Special attention is paid to traceability and quality management. Additionally, storage and handling of chemicals is in the focus. The quality assurance officer can issue obligations and recommendations which need to be implemented by the customer. A uniform questionnaire is available and is used in all operating countries. Failed On-Site Visits or not implementing the agreed obligations in due time can lead to a withdrawal of the certificate.

If a customer is using the MADE IN GREEN Label, special questions concerning labelling and the supply chain are checked.

For ECO PASSPORT, the On-Site Visit is only necessary for the highest level of the certification. It follows the ZDHC guidelines for ZDHC conformance Level 3.

AUDITS

For STeP, the audit is the core of the certification. After a self-assessment and a document check the customer is visited by specially trained auditors. The resulting level then defines the visiting interval. In a STeP audit quality management, traceability and chemical management, but also social responsibility, occupational health and safety and a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the facility on the environment are evaluated. All STeP reports are peer reviewed by the OEKO-TEX® secretariat.

The training of STeP auditors is developed and performed by an interdisciplinary group of certified and experienced lead auditors. It is organized annually by the OEKO-TEX® secretariat. The future STeP auditors are nominated by the OEKO-TEX® partner institutes. To participate in the STeP Training the nominated STeP auditors need to conduct an extensive self-study and pass an online test. After a successful evaluation and passed final test the trained STeP auditors need to be overseen by an experienced auditor (>3 audits) during their first audits. Inexperienced auditors will be evaluated by their responsible lead auditor and can only conduct audits by themselves after the lead auditor approved it. Generally, only persons authorized and employed by an OEKO-TEX® partner institute and having participated and passed the STeP auditor training as well as being accredited by the OEKO-TEX® secretariat are entitled to carry out audits at facilities. Retraining is performed every 2 years. If less than 3 audits are performed, the basic training needs to be repeated. The STeP auditor peer groups is a community that encourages knowledge exchange and support.