



# Quality Assurance

OEKO-TEX® Association

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OEKO-TEX®

International Association for Research and Testing in  
the Field of Textile and Leather Ecology

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## 1. Goal

Confidence is a cornerstone value for us at OEKO-TEX®. We are dedicated to fostering trust in our partnerships, methodologies, processes and, above all, our certifications. This commitment drives us to uphold rigorous quality standards for ourselves, our partners, and the products and manufacturing facilities we certify. To maintain consistently high levels of quality, we have implemented a range of robust control mechanisms.

## 2. Institute Audits

Our 17 accredited, independent textile and leather partner institutes are a crucial part of our certification process. Therefore, they undergo audits every three years conducted by the CEO of OEKO-TEX® and the OEKO-TEX® auditor. These audits are designed to uphold our high standard of quality and to identify any potential obstacles. During the audit, spot checks on the certification process of the respective institute are performed. These checks assess the adequacy of testing scopes, the accuracy of On-Site Visit reports, and the proper accounting of certifications. Additionally, internal procedures agreed upon within the OEKO-TEX® Association are reviewed. If any incorrect procedures or processes are discovered, the institute must take corrective action to prevent such deviations from occurring. The OEKO-TEX® secretariat supports the institute through targeted training initiatives if needed. Severe discrepancies in the certification process may result in the withdrawal of certificates issued due to incorrect processes unless the deficiencies can be rectified.

## 3. Control Tests

Product control tests are performed to ensure 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. Each year, OEKO-TEX® is committed to check a certain percentage of STANDARD 100, ORGANIC COTTON, LEATHER STANDARD and ECO PASSPORT certificates and MADE IN GREEN labels. The samples for the product controls are picked from the different production stages, countries and sources. Furthermore, they 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 and the certificate holder must prove compliance with the standards' requirements. New samples are requested to verify the successful implementation of the requirements. In case the non-conformity cannot be improved, is repeated, or the certificate holder refuses to cooperate, the certificate is withdrawn.



## 4. Round Robin Tests

Laboratory testing forms the cornerstone of most OEKO-TEX® certificates. To ensure consistency and accuracy across our partner institutes' laboratories, we conduct annual Round Robin Tests. Participation in these interlaboratory comparisons is mandatory for all OEKO-TEX® partner institutes.

The Round Robin Tests provide invaluable insights into laboratory testing performance and allow for the assessment of method accuracy by evaluating various parameters across identical samples tested with identical methods in different laboratories. Results from these tests are consolidated and discussed in Technical Meetings of OEKO-TEX® Working Groups, as well as in the General Manager Meeting, which convenes all general managers of OEKO-TEX® partner institutes.

If discrepancies arise in the results, the affected institute is required to take corrective action. Until these actions are implemented, the institute cannot conduct the parameter(s) in question. During this time the parameter in question must be performed by another institutes within the association.

## 5. 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. For ORGANIC COTTON, the On-Site Visit is conducted annually. 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 officers familiarise themselves with the local conditions of the company and evaluate them. Special attention is paid to traceability and quality management. Additionally, the storage and handling of raw materials are in the focus.

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

For ECO PASSPORT, an On-Site Visit is required exclusively for the highest certification level. This visit encompasses evaluations of quality management, process control, and traceability, along with assessments related to environmental impact, chemical handling, occupational health and safety, emergency preparedness, and social responsibility. The On-Site Visit adheres to the ZDHC guidelines to achieve ZDHC Conformance Level 2.

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.

## 6. Audits

Audits are fundamental to the certification processes of STeP and RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS. Following a self-assessment and document review, customers undergo visits from specially trained OEKO-TEX® auditors .

In a STeP audit, various aspects such as quality management, traceability, chemical management, social responsibility, occupational health and safety, and environmental impact are meticulously evaluated.

RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS audits focus on assessing the company's due diligence management processes, including the extent of implementation of obligations related to human rights and environmental criteria within the company and its supply chains.

All STeP and RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS reports undergo peer review by the OEKO-TEX® secretariat to ensure quality and consistency.

## 7. Auditor Training

STeP auditor training is conducted annually by an interdisciplinary group of experienced lead auditors organized by the OEKO-TEX® secretariat. OEKO-TEX® partner institutes nominate prospective STeP auditors who then undergo extensive self-study and an online test before participating in the in-person training. Upon successful completion, experienced auditors supervise newly trained auditors during their initial audits. Inexperienced auditors are evaluated by their lead auditor and can only conduct audits independently after approval. Only individuals authorized and employed by OEKO-TEX® partner institutes, having completed the STeP auditor training and approved by the OEKO-TEX® secretariat, are eligible to conduct facility audits. Retraining occurs every two years, requiring basic training repetition if fewer than three audits are conducted. The STeP auditor peer groups foster knowledge exchange and mutual support within the community. In regular auditor calls, important topics are repeated, new developments are discussed and a sense of community is fostered.

Auditor training for RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS are conducted on a regular frequency. Auditors undergo extensive self-study and tests before they participate in the training. Upon successful completion, newly trained auditors are supervised by experienced auditors during their initial audits, depending on their qualifications and experience. Only individuals authorized and employed by OEKO-TEX® partner institutes, having completed the RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS auditor training and approved by the OEKO-TEX® secretariat, are eligible to conduct facility audits. Further, RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS auditors foster knowledge exchange and mutual support within the community.

## 8. Spot Visits

Spot Visits are either announced or unannounced visits conducted by an OEKO-TEX® auditor at the facility of a certificate holder. These visits ensure ongoing compliance with OEKO-TEX® standards throughout the year and



validate the accuracy of the information provided in reports. They can be conducted in any country and at any facility previously audited by an OEKO-TEX® institute. The primary focus is on the implementation of obligations identified during the previous visit and the overall evaluation of the production site. If access for an audit is refused or if significant non-conformities with the applicable standard are observed, the certificate may be withdrawn.