



# FSC™ Chain of Custody certification

## Service information

### What is FSC Chain of Custody (CoC) certification?

FSC Chain of Custody certification is an essential part of the Forest Stewardship Council™ scheme for certification and labelling of responsibly produced timber. Its main purpose is to control the flow of certified products throughout the supply chain. Your auditor will therefore focus on procurement, processing, volume accounting, sales and labelling of certified material to ensure the integrity of FSC claims and trademark usage.

### What are the key roles and responsibilities within the FSC system?

FSC is an international organisation that owns the FSC system and develops the certification standards and requirements that certified companies need to follow. NEPCon is an FSC certifier accredited by FSC's system surveillance body Accreditation Services International (ASI). All FSC certification bodies need to follow accreditation rules published by FSC International Center and ASI.

### Which certification standards apply to my organisation?

The main CoC certification standard (FSC-STD-40-004) applies to all CoC certified companies and sets out general requirements for handling material. Within this main standard, individual criteria may or may not apply to every company, depending on the activities performed at each certified site. For example, three options are available for tracking certified material and making claims. Companies may maintain physical separation of certified material (the transfer system), or mix certified and non-certified (the credit and percentage systems). The standard FSC-STD-50-001 regulates FSC trademark usage and is mandatory if you intend to use FSC's trademarks.

Additional standards may apply depending on your set-up and scope of certification. For example, companies mixing material shall control the non-certified material, according to an additional standard (FSC-STD-40-005) with the aim of preventing illegal unacceptable material from entering into FSC products. Further standards may apply, e.g. if you are sourcing reclaimed material (FSC-STD-40-007) or when several sites are combined under a single certificate (FSC-STD-40-003).

### Which trademarks can we use?

The FSC logo and trademarks can be applied to certified products and used for promotional purposes if you are CoC certified and have signed an FSC Trademark License Agreement. You must submit any public trademark to us for approval prior to publication.



### What is the cost structure?

The total certification cost consists of the costs related to the auditing services and the FSC Annual Administration Fee (AAF). The auditing fee depends on the size and complexity of the company and its CoC system. This is specified in our proposal. The FSC AAF fee is determined based on the total turnover of all your wood-based material (both certified and non-certified). The fee is set by FSC and may change during the validity period of the certificate.

### What about confidentiality?

To check correct accounting for certified volumes, the CoC auditors will need access to confidential information, such as your suppliers, buyers and conversion factors. The confidentiality of all data is secured and our staff is bound by strict confidentiality requirements. However, all FSC CoC certificates are listed in the public FSC database (<http://info.fsc.org/>) along with information about the scope of your certificate, such as product types and sites.



## What does the certification process entail?

FSC certificates are issued for a five year period. We conduct an initial assessment as a basis for your certification. Subsequently, you need to undergo annual audits to maintain the certificate.



Once you have signed the certification and trademark license agreements, you need to prepare for certification by ensuring compliance with all the certification requirements. This includes assigning responsibilities, developing chain of custody procedures and training relevant staff. NEPCon assigns a contact person who will be available to respond to your questions during the entire audit process, and we provide an FSC CoC toolkit that helps you to prepare.

We recommend that you submit your documented procedures to NEPCon for review at least five days prior to the main evaluation.

FSC audits are normally conducted onsite and last up to one work day per site. Interviews, document review, touring your facilities and review of your volume accounting system are common parts of an onsite audit. In case your company does not physically handle material, we may decide to conduct a desk based evaluation.

After the audit, we prepare a written report describing the results of the audit. Any identified non-conformities are also described and major issues need to be corrected before the certificate can be issued. The report is quality reviewed and submitted to you for any comments. Upon a positive certification decision, we issue your certificate, and the FSC database is updated.

## How do I maintain my certificate?

You need to comply with the certification requirements to remain certified. This is verified through annual audits. In between the audits, we help you to stay up to speed on the requirements by providing regular updates on system changes. If we identify non-conformities in your system during audits, you must take appropriate and effective action to address these.

To secure the integrity of the FSC system, rigorous requirements apply to the follow-up on non-conformities, which are graded as major or minor. Minor issues are commonly verified during the next annual audit; if they have been insufficiently addressed, they are upgraded to major.

Major non-conformities must be addressed within maximum three months, thus requiring an additional audit to verify your timely compliance. Failure to address major non-conformities, or the discovery of five or more major non-conformities during an audit, will lead to suspension of your certificate. A suspended certificate can be re-instated if you ensure system compliance and this is verified through an audit.

