

THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS

BUREAU VERITAS

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1. INTRODUCTION

This brochure is designed to provide you with a clear understanding of the day-to-day practice of certification. It offers practical insights and guidance to help you navigate and prepare for the operational aspects of a certification journey.

This can be particularly useful if your organization is seeking certification for the first time. If you already have experience with certification, the content of this brochure can serve as a valuable refresher to brush up on your knowledge.

CONTENT AND ORDER OF INFORMATION

In this brochure, we have followed the standard sequence of the various steps in the certification process. The focus is on the most essential aspects that you and your organization may encounter.

Following a brief, summary introduction titled 'The Certification Process at a Glance', we focus on the essence of the certification agreement, which forms the foundation of every certification journey.
Under the title 'Certification Step by Step', we guide you through the various stages that must be completed during the certification cycle.
In the chapter titled 'Certification Aspects', we delve deeper into the practical aspects and circumstances that may arise during the course of a certification journey. In addition to these topics, we address the subject of accreditation and the benefits that certification can offer your organization.
Finally, we direct you to additional information available on our website, www.benelux.bureauveritas.com. We conclude the brochure with an alphabetical glossary that explains frequently used terms and the specific jargon unique to the world of certification.

This brochure does not provide an exhaustive description of all possible situations and exceptions that may arise in the daily practice of the certification process. Instead, we have strived to clearly outline and explain the foundations of certification, along with common aspects and situations. Should you have any specific questions that remain unanswered after consulting this brochure, we are, of course, happy to provide further clarification.

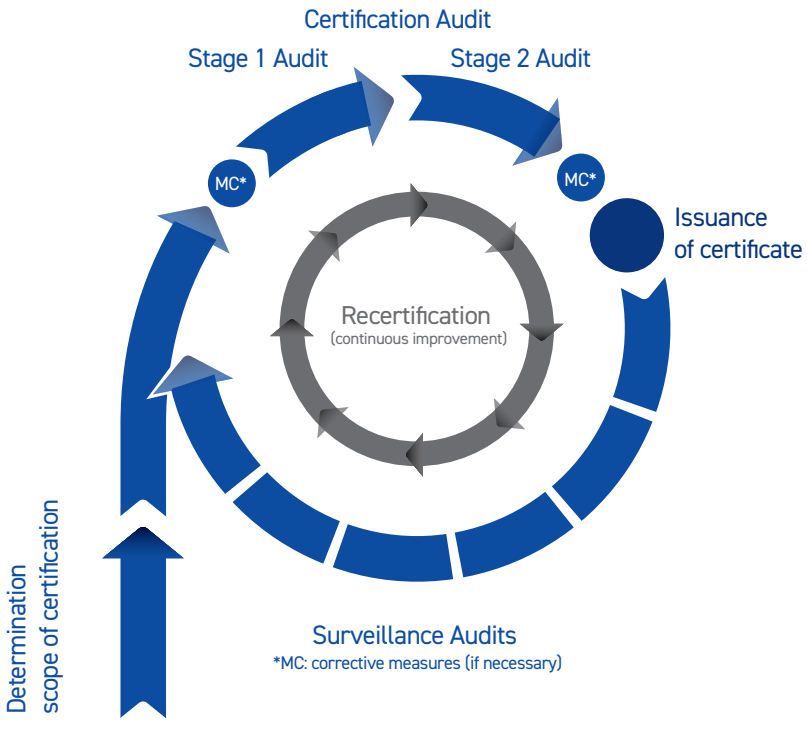
This brochure is compiled from years of national and international experience, illustrating that certification is a collaboration between your organization and Bureau Veritas Certification. The guiding principle is to offer professional, independent, reliable, and value-adding services within a long-term partnership.

2. CERTIFICATION PROCESS AT A GLANCE

Before we dive into the details of the various steps and aspects of certification, we would like to present a schematic overview of the entire certification process (see the image below).

The overview is based on the common structure of a three-year certification cycle. This structure applies to management systems and their related international certification standards and certification. Many other certification standards, including industry-specific standards, have been developed using this same structure and are also based on this three-year cyclical setup.
The term management system can be defined as follows: a set of interrelated agreements within an organization to establish and achieve policies and objectives.

Centred around a specific theme – such as quality, environment, health, safety, or information security – the system aims to identify and mitigate risks, take into account the needs and expectations of stakeholders, and periodically evaluate and continually improve performance.
Examples of certification standards relating to management systems include ISO 9001 (quality), ISO 14001 (environment), ISO 45001 (occupational health and safety), ISO 22000 (food safety), ISO 27001 (information security), and ISO 50001 (energy management).





3. CERTIFICATION CONTRACT

Our services are always built on a contract or certification agreement between your organization and Bureau Veritas Certification. This agreement is more than just a formal, commercial confirmation of the terms and conditions that apply throughout the certification cycle.

Before entering into a contract, we work with you to carry out a detailed assessment of your needs and requirements related to certifying your organization against the standard(s) of your choice. A specific set of data is required to draft a certification proposal that is tailored to your organization and the requirements linked to the standard(s) you wish to be certified against.

The minimum information we require from your organization consists of:

- Company name and address details
- Chamber of Commerce extract
- Exact description of the business activities covered by the certification ('scope')
- Number of employees
- Number of secondary locations in addition to the main office (if applicable)

This data forms the basis of the quote calculation and is therefore the starting point of our services. It is therefore important that this information is and remains complete and up to date throughout the term of the certification agreement and the corresponding certification cycle.

Naturally, it is possible that one or more details may change during this period. Therefore, in the section 'Certification Aspects – Organizational Changes' of this brochure, we pay special attention to this situation and the actions you need to take.

4. CERTIFICATION STEP BY STEP

Following the general overview of the certification cycle, we will now describe the individual stages of the certification process. Broadly speaking, these can be divided into: Stage 1 Audit (initial audit), Stage 2 Audit (main audit), certification nomination, certification decision, certificate (issuance), and Surveillance Audits. Together, the Stage 1 and Stage 2 Audits mark the beginning of the certification and the certification cycle.

STAGE 1 AUDIT (INITIAL AUDIT)

The Stage 1 Audit, or 'initial audit', initiates the certification process, serving as an introduction and orientation to an organization. This phase follows a structured, predefined pattern consisting of specific components.

- general introduction to your organization
- review of the documentation related to the standard(s) for which certification is sought
- verification of the performance of internal audits conducted by your organization
- assessment of formalized policies in relation to the standard(s) covered by the certification
- verification of the management review performed by senior management
- assessment of compliance with relevant laws and regulations related to the standard(s) for which certification is sought
- evaluation of the application of requirements from the standard(s) against which certification takes place
- site tour to inspect facilities/locations
- verification of stakeholder management

During the Stage 1 Audit, the auditor addresses the aforementioned points and discusses them with your organization's senior management and the employee(s) responsible for certification.

To properly assess the implementation of these points in daily practice, your organization must have applied the requirements of the standard(s) to be certified for at least three months prior to the start of the Stage 1 Audit. At the end of the Stage 1 Audit, the auditor will coordinate the scheduling of the Stage 2 Audit with you.

STAGE 2 AUDIT (MAIN AUDIT)

The stage 2 audit is the final part and is also referred to as the 'main audit'. The purpose of this stage 2 audit is to assess whether your organization complies with the mandatory requirements of the standard(s) against which your organization is being audited. During this audit, the following components will be addressed, among others – and partly depending on the specific requirements of this/these standard(s):

- opening meeting with the board or central management of your organization
- identification of potential bottlenecks and risks that your organization may face
- explanation and alignment of the practical procedures regarding the audit and planning
- detailed investigation into the method of implementing the mandatory elements of the certification standard(s) into daily business operations
- identification of relevant stakeholders and the associated interaction from your organization
- interviews with employees
- closing meeting with the board or central management of your organization

During the closing meeting, the auditor in charge or lead auditor (the auditor with final responsibility for the audit team if it consists of 2 or more auditors) provides an explanation and summary of the investigation conducted and the findings observed.

It is possible that non-conformities will be identified in relation to the standard(s) that form the basis of the Stage 1 and Stage 2 Audit. This situation is addressed in the Certification Aspects section of this brochure and the Non-conformities subsection.

CERTIFICATION NOMINATION

If the (lead) auditor concludes on the basis of his/her findings that your organization complies with the mandatory elements of the standard, this will lead to a recommendation for certification or certification nomination.



CERTIFICATION DECISION

This recommendation is subject to an objective, substantive review by an independent and competent auditor or committee of auditors within Bureau Veritas Certification, based on the audit report. A positive review of the recommendation or nomination will lead to the issuance of a formal certificate, which is generally valid for three years.

If the license agreement between Bureau Veritas Certification and the scheme owner stipulates that the certificate must be registered for inclusion in a certificate register, Bureau Veritas Certification will arrange this separately from the issuance of the certificate.

CERTIFICATE

The certificate you receive from Bureau Veritas Certification, which you can use at your own discretion for promotional purposes (whether or not in combination with the corresponding certification logo – see the Logo Use Manual brochure at www.benelux.bureauveritas.com), contains the following information:

- name of the legal entity of your organization (as your organization is formally registered with the Chamber of Commerce)
- optional: trade name/trade names, provided that these are filed and registered with the Chamber of Commerce in combination with the registered company name
- the standard against which your organization is certified
- description of the specific business activities ('scope') to which the certification applies
- indication of the specific location(s) to which the certification applies
- period of validity (expiry date) of the certificate

SURVEILLANCE AUDIT

Although the certificate is in principle issued for a duration of three years, its validity is at the same time limited in the sense that validity is dependent on continuous compliance with the mandatory standard requirements.
This is assessed on the basis of interim 'surveillance audits'. We conduct these periodically performed investigations according to a schedule agreed with you in advance, and they generally take place annually.
The surveillance audits cover – measured over the entire three-year certification cycle – all mandatory requirements of the standard(s) to which the certification applies.
The substantive execution is prepared based on the auditor's experience with your organization and in consultation with you as the client.

RECERTIFICATION AUDIT

Once the certification cycle has been completed, you can start a new cycle with a duration of three years. This new cycle begins with a Recertification Audit.
This audit is comparable to the setup of the original Stage 1 and Stage 2 Audit. Naturally, we take into account the performance achieved by your organization in the previous cycle.
In accordance with the applicable rules, the Recertification Audit must be scheduled, executed, and successfully completed in a timely manner. If this audit takes place too late, there will be insufficient time to resolve and close any non-conformities before the expiry date of the current certificate. As a result, the certificate may expire before it can be renewed. If the Recertification Audit is completed within 6 months after the expiry date, the certificate history can be maintained.

In the event that the Recertification Audit can only be completed more than 6 months after the expiry date, your organization will have to undergo a new certification process and the history of the previous certification will be lost. To prevent this situation from happening, we will contact you well in advance of the expiry date of the current certificate to schedule the Recertification Audit (and thereby recertification). Assuming the Recertification Audit is successful, you will then be able to retain a valid certificate at all times.

5. CERTIFICATION ASPECTS

In this chapter, we provide a further explanation of various aspects that you and your organization may encounter during this process.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

Should any significant changes affecting your organization occur during the certification cycle, you must report these immediately to Bureau Veritas Certification by email.
Examples include a change or expansion of your business activities covered by the certification (scope), an increase or decrease in the number of employees or locations, or a change in your organization's legal structure.

As stated in the 'Certification Agreement' section, your organization's basic data forms an important basis for the certification agreement and the services we provide based on it. Any change to this data may affect the current agreement and the associated certification process. Your timely notification allows us to determine whether the original time allocation for the components of the certification process is still sufficient for a correct assessment, or whether it needs to be adjusted.

Failure to report interim changes in a timely manner may lead to a finding during a surveillance or recertification audit that additional investigation is necessary. This can have direct consequences for the validity of your certificate, and we prefer to prevent such situations in direct consultation with you.

NON CONFORMITIES (MINOR & MAJOR NON CONFORMITIES)

The description of the certification process in the section 'Certification step-by-step' outlines the situation where the intended certification is achieved and maintained throughout the certification cycle without any form of 'disruption' to the process. However, it is possible that so-called non-conformities may arise during the certification process, a practical aspect that requires further explanation.
If the auditor concludes that one or more mandatory elements of the standard against which the certification is being carried out have not been met, or have been met insufficiently, this constitutes a non-conformity.
The severity of the identified non-conformity determines whether it is qualified as a 'minor non-conformity' or a 'major non-conformity'. This distinction also influences how the identified non-conformity must be followed up. Following up on non-conformities is a primary responsibility of your organization, albeit in consultation with the auditor concerned.

MINOR NON CONFORMITY

A 'minor non-conformity' is a small, non-critical deviation from a norm, standard, or requirement. Under certain circumstances, its follow-up can be completed by providing additional documentation to the auditor for further assessment.

MAJOR NON CONFORMITY

A 'major non-conformity' is a significant deviation from established norms, standards, or requirements. In the event of a major non-conformity, written follow-up may prove insufficient in the auditor's judgment and may require an additional investigation, also referred to as a 'follow-up' audit.

FOLLOW UP & CLOSURE OF NON CONFORMITIES

If non-conformities are identified, your organization must take so-called corrections and corrective actions. Specific guidelines apply here, such as the requirement that your organization submits all proposed solutions for the identified non-conformities—including a clear root cause analysis—to the auditor for assessment by email and in a timely manner.

We distinguish three types of corrective actions:

- actions implemented during the audit: in such cases, non conformity reports are discussed and resolved with you prior to the closing meeting;
- actions involving only a change to the documented management system: in these situations, non-conformity reports can be closed out by submitting written evidence along with a root cause analysis, making an on-site verification unnecessary.
- actions involving changes that require on-site verification: in such cases, a supplementary (follow-up) audit is necessary.



ADDITIONAL DEFINITIONS

For the sake of completeness, we explain other terms that may be part of the daily practice of the certification process.

Area of Concern
An 'area of concern' (AOC) is a potential non-conformity identified during a Stage 1 Audit. The Stage 2 Audit can only take place once any 'areas of concern' or non-conformities from the Stage 1 Audit have been resolved and closed out.

Opportunity for Improvement
An 'opportunity for improvement' (OFI) is a potential improvement that is completely separate from the basic requirement to comply with the standard against which certification takes place. Due to the strict separation between certification and consultancy, an OFI must never contain content that could be construed as (any form of) advice.

THIRD PARTY INSPECTION

Bureau Veritas Certification carries out certification for a large number of certification standards under accreditation, a subject you can read more about in the 'Accreditation' section.

Third-party inspection means that supervisory accreditation bodies, such as the RvA in the Netherlands and Belac in Belgium, have the right to witness audits conducted by Bureau Veritas Certification to assess our organization's compliance with accreditation and certification rules.
As a client, you must agree to and actively cooperate with such witness audits at all times.

SUSPENSION

Bureau Veritas Certification reserves the right to suspend or revoke a previously issued certificate at any time during its validity period. In doing so, we will naturally proceed with the utmost care and in accordance with strict guidelines.
In general, suspension or revocation of a certificate is considered if:

- the client fails to take corrective measures regarding observed deviations within the agreed period
- the client persistently fails to meet the requirements of the certification standard(s)
- the client misuses the certificate or certification logos
- the client damages the good name or business reputation of Bureau Veritas Certification

We will do everything reasonably within our power to enable you, as the client, to take appropriate corrective measures in a timely manner. However, should your organization fail to take such measures within a reasonable period, the certificate will be suspended or revoked. We also reserve the right to announce the suspension or revocation of the certificate publicly and in accordance with the applicable rules, in any manner whatsoever.

COMPLAINTS

We view a complaint primarily as a concrete opportunity to improve our services. Additionally, we see complaints as a clear signal that the performance we have delivered deviates from your expectations. Although we handle every complaint, regardless of the form in which it is submitted to us, we request our clients to submit any complaint first and foremost via our website www.benelux.bureauveritas.com (section About Us – subsection Bureau Veritas – complaints and appeals).

APPEAL

In accordance with the applicable accreditation and certification guidelines to which we, as a certification body, adhere, you, as the client, may appeal against a decision of Bureau Veritas Certification. You may appeal against a decision regarding:

- a refusal to accept an application for certification
- a refusal to recommend certification
- a suspension, withdrawal, or annulment of the certificate
- an objection or complaint from third parties against the granting of a certificate

You can find more information on our website www.benelux.bureauveritas.com (section About Us – subsection Bureau Veritas – complaints and appeals).

TERMINATION

If you do not wish to maintain your certificate or consider yourself unable to do so due to circumstances, you must formally cancel by email and address your cancellation to the Sales Department of Bureau Veritas Certification.
Upon receipt of your cancellation, you will receive a digital confirmation from us, and we are required to invalidate and reclaim your certificate. With this, your right to continue using the certificate and the relevant certification logos expires subject to the established notice period.



6. ACCREDITATION

Certification bodies such as Bureau Veritas Certification are also referred to as conformity assessment bodies. Just like inspection bodies, for instance, we assess whether an organization meets recognized and (internationally) accepted standards so that stakeholders can rely on compliance with the evaluated standard(s). This is only possible if certification or inspection bodies verify and assess this compliance in an expert, objective, and independent manner. This expertise, objectivity, and independence are guaranteed by accreditation bodies.
When periodically verifying and assessing certification and inspection bodies, these accreditation bodies apply strict, internationally recognized standards and guidelines that focus on the following aspects:

- expertise
- impartiality
- independence
- process monitoring
- improvement culture

Respecting accreditation requirements is part of our vision and forms an integral part of our services. Accreditation guarantees and justifies the trust of our clients. Certification by an accredited institution such as Bureau Veritas Certification therefore gives your certificate extra added value.
Accreditation is largely driven by stakeholders in the certification process, including scheme or standard owners. As a rule, the scheme owner is the party that holds the intellectual property of the certification standard against which assessment is conducted.

This party compiles the content of the standard and standard requirements, and also sets requirements regarding the manner in which the standard is assessed in practice by certification bodies.
Partly depending on the ownership of the certification standard – such as the international ISO organization in the case of standards from the ISO series – accreditation is established in close cooperation between the scheme owner, the accreditation body, and the auditing certification bodies.

Our policy is aimed at pursuing certification under accreditation where accreditation is applicable. Worldwide, Bureau Veritas Certification holds dozens of accreditations covering a wide range of certification standards, obtained through various accreditation bodies.
In this context, we have been collaborating for many years in the Netherlands and Belgium with the RvA (Dutch Accreditation Council) and the BELAC (Belgian Accreditation Body), and within our international network organization with numerous other accreditation bodies outside the Benelux.
You can find more information on our website www.benelux.bureauveritas.com (About Us section – Bureau Veritas subsection – independence and accreditation).

7. BENEFITS OF CERTIFICATION

The reason(s) for obtaining certification can vary significantly from organization to organization, although there are similarities in many cases. Aside from the fact that every organization has its own unique history and often operates in specific (market) conditions, based on years of experience we can identify the most common considerations – and the associated benefits. We list the most important benefits in no particular order:

RISK INSIGHT

Risk Insight Risk management is a central component of management systems and the associated certification. The internal and external risk assessment provides organizations with insight into opportunities and threats, which is necessary for effective and responsible business operations.

DYNAMIC RESPONSIVENESS

Certified management systems contribute to the dynamic responsiveness of organizations. As a result, they can better anticipate and respond to changes occurring both within and outside the organization.

COMMERCIAL 'LICENSE TO OPERATE'

Certification helps an organization distinguish itself from direct competitors and meet the requirements and expectations of clients and other stakeholders.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Continuous improvement forms the basis of every certification standard. Periodic performance evaluation is an integral part of certification. Combined with a better understanding of risks, greater dynamic responsiveness, and insight into stakeholder interests, this provides the organization with concrete tools to permanently improve performance.

COMPLIANCE

Demonstrably and continuously complying with relevant laws and regulations has become indispensable to modern and future-oriented business operations. It is for this reason that compliance is embedded in many certification standards.

TRANSPARENCY AND REPUTATION

Independent, objective, and external testing and assessment of (inter)national certification standards in the form of certification provides confidence to clients and other stakeholders and strengthens the reputation of certified organizations.



8. APPENDIX: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

TERM	EXPLANATION
Accreditation	a formal recognition by an independent, competent body (accreditation body) that an organization meets established international standards and quality requirements
Deviation / Non Conformity	a non-conformity – when a product, process, or service fails to meet established requirements, standards (e.g., ISO standards), or contractual requirements
Area of Concern	potential non-conformity identified during a Stage 1 Audit
Certification Audit	the complete set of Initial/Stage 1 and Main/Stage 2 Audits
Certification Cycle	the entire period during which an organization remains certified to a specific norm or standard, including all audits and renewals that take place during this period
Certification Nomination	recommendation for certification (issuance of certificate) by the Lead Auditor
Compliance	comply with standard requirements and/or relevant legislation and regulations
Follow up Audit	additional investigation following up on minor/major non-conformities
Internal Audit	(periodic) internal evaluation carried out by the certified organization itself (in accordance with the relevant standard requirements)
Main / Stage 2 Audit	second stage of a certification audit
Major Non Conformity	a significant deviation from established norms, standards, or requirements
Management System	a structured set of processes, procedures, guidelines, and tools that an organization uses to plan, execute, monitor, and improve its activities in order to achieve established objectives
Minor Non Conformity	a minor, non-critical deviation from a norm, standard, or requirements
Non Conformity / Deviation	deviation from a mandatory normative element of a certification standard (see also Minor/Major Non-Conformity)
Opportunity of Improvement	opportunity to improve (for example: a policy, measure, procedure etc.)
Recertification Audit	assessment whether the management system continuously meets the requirements and is effective; a recommendation for certification will be made upon a positive determination
Scope	a clear description of what is certified exactly; the scope defines the boundaries, the area of application, and the extent of the certification
Stage 1 / Initial Audit	first phase of the certification audit; this involves determining whether the scope and premises have been correctly defined, as well as assessing the management system's documented information to determine whether the organization is ready for the Stage 2 audit
Stage 2 / Main Audit	assessment of the introduction (implementation), including the effectiveness of the management system
Surveillance Audit	periodic assessment conducted after the completion of a certification audit; the frequency is generally annual
Certification Decision	objective, substantive assessment of a certification proposal by an independent and competent certification committee or person



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