

Background information on the evaluation of responsible sourcing certification schemes within BREEAM v2.0

1 Introduction

BREEAM includes credits for responsible sourcing. The aim of the credits is to encourage the specification and procurement of responsibly sourced materials (RSM). Evidence of responsible sourcing may be supplied in the form of independent certification within a responsible sourcing scheme.

Responsible sourcing certification schemes and the requirements of the standards on which they are based vary widely, so evaluation criteria have been developed for the acceptance of responsible sourcing certification schemes within BREEAM.

The purposes of the evaluation criteria are:

- to provide a means by which BRE Global can confirm that responsible sourcing certification schemes are credible and fit for purpose,
- to provide a transparent means by which the scope of responsible sourcing assessment standards and schedules can be compared by a broad range of stakeholders, including users of BREEAM assessment systems, and

This document contains background information on the evaluation of responsible sourcing certification schemes within BREEAM. The evaluation criteria and the process for the evaluation and acceptance of RSM schemes within BREEAM assessments, including application and appeals, are contained in separate documents.

2 Terms and definitions

Relevant terms and definitions are contained in *Criteria for the evaluation of responsible sourcing certification schemes within BREEAM v3.0*

3 What is responsible sourcing?

Responsible sourcing is a relatively new concept for most material sectors within the construction products sector. It broadly relates to the management of sustainable development in the provision and procurement of products¹.

The responsible sourcing of construction products has its roots in forest stewardship, where certification schemes have been used to provide assurance of provenance and of best practice in forest stewardship for many years. They also cover issues of social and economic equity and engagement.

¹ Adapted from BS 8902:2009

The responsible sourcing agenda has broadened in recent years and now encompasses a wide range of environmental, social and economic sustainability issues across different material sectors.

4 Elements of a responsible sourcing certification scheme²

To understand the development and layout of the evaluation criteria it is useful to understand how responsible sourcing certification schemes function.

Responsible sourcing certification schemes consider a broad range of sustainability issues. Different industry sectors have different environmental, social and economic impacts and opportunities. So sector specific responsible sourcing certification schemes may focus requirements on the most significant sustainability issues for that sector.

Certification has been widely used in a range of sectors as a tool for providing independent verification that a defined set of requirements is being met. As a result of the experience gained, all certification schemes, including those for responsible sourcing, are usually made up of three elements:

Standard: this sets out the requirements which must be met and against which certification assessments are made. Requirements in responsible sourcing standards typically include the implementation of management systems; measurement and reporting of performance and in some cases specific performance requirements³. Standards are developed by standard-setting bodies.

Certification: this is the process of establishing whether or not the standard has been met, usually carried out by a certification body or certifier (also referred to as a registration body or registrar especially in North America).

Accreditation: this is the mechanism for ensuring that the organisations which undertake certification are competent and produce credible, consistent results, sometimes described as 'certifying the certifiers'. Accreditation is undertaken by an accreditation body.

To emphasise the importance of each of these elements to the certification scheme as a whole, they are often shown schematically as the three sides of a triangle which represents the certification scheme, as shown in the Figure 1 below.

Product claims: In addition, if the scheme is going to be used as a basis for identifying responsibly sourced products and for making product claims then a mechanism for controlling this also needs to be in place. This requires:

Traceability: materials may go through many production and logistical stages between source and the final product. There must be a mechanism for tracing constituent materials to provide certainty that the product or product line about which the claim is being made is responsibly sourced.

Claims and Labelling: it is essential to ensure that any claims made about a product or any labels are clear, credible and honest. This requires a set of rules to be followed by those making claims or labelling products.

² Text and figures adapted from CPET Category A Criteria (2010), available at <http://www.cpet.org.uk/>

³ Framework standards such as BS 8902 provide general specifications for the development of schemes rather than requirements against which certification assessments can be made. More detailed requirements must therefore be developed for the purpose of assessment. The documents that contain these requirements are typically referred to as 'scheme schedules' or 'assessment schedules'.

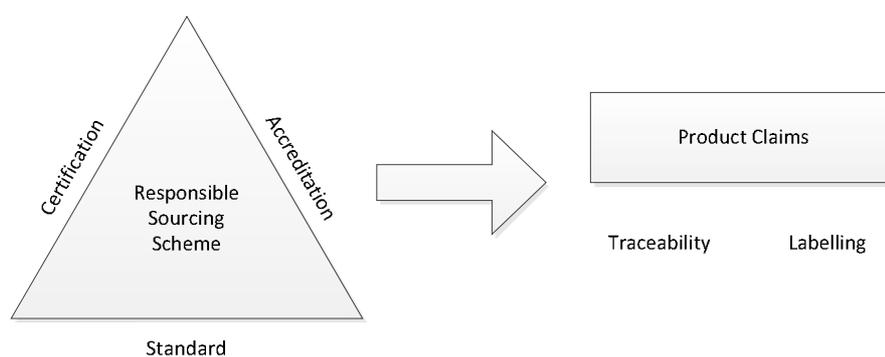


Figure 1 - Schematic representation of the elements of a responsible sourcing certification scheme

5 General guidance on applying the evaluation criteria

The evaluation criteria apply to the requirements contained in responsible sourcing standards, scheme schedules and associated certification schemes.

The performance of individual organisations, products or supply chains that are certified within a responsible sourcing certification scheme may differ, and in some cases may substantially exceed the requirements of the standards. However, unless the scheme provides a means of differentiating levels of performance then certification can only provide assurance that the mandatory requirements of standards and assessment schedules have been met.

For this reason it is only possible to deduce compliance with the mandatory elements of a scheme. Where a standard or assessment schedule contains 'optional' or 'recommended' requirements i.e. those that are not compulsory in order to achieve certification, they will not be evaluated. This is because users of the certification information cannot be sure whether or not the requirement was met.