



Contingency RSPO Audit Procedure

(This procedure is applicable when force majeure (such as pandemics, natural disasters, civil unrest, etc) preventing the audit team from conducting field verifications)

25 August 2020

Introduction

In March 2020, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) Secretariat issued memos to all its accredited Certification Bodies (CBs) on the conduct of audits against the RSPO P&C and RSPO Supply Chain Certification (SCC).

In view that the COVID-19 pandemic is still an on-going concern in many countries and regions, and that travel restrictions or tight quarantine procedures are still imposed by their respective governments, the RSPO Secretariat has been working closely with RSPO members, CBs and our accreditation body to identify ways to ensure that our standards remain credible, and that the impacts of COVID-19 do not impact our ability to uphold the high level of assurance that is expected from the RSPO certification systems.

COVID-19 RSPO Audit Procedures

This procedure has been developed to govern exceptions arising from disruptions of audit activities due to the COVID-19 and travel restrictions imposed by the authorities. These are temporary measures and CBs are required to retain evidence of security warnings for those cases where an on-site audit by their audit team was not possible. As soon as travel restrictions have been lifted by the relevant authorities, RSPO audits shall be conducted as per regular RSPO procedures.

The following procedures shall be applied:

RSPO Supply Chain Certification

The CBs are allowed to make the decision as to whether an on-site or remote audit is to be conducted for their RSPO supply chain certified clients. If a remote audit is carried out, the CBs need to maintain relevant evidence that demonstrates that they were prevented from conducting the on-site audit. This provision is covering the Initial Certification, Annual Surveillance or Recertification audits. The PalmTrace license for SCC is only allowed to be extended for a maximum of 3-months. License extension shall be requested prior to the expiry of the PalmTrace license and can be done so if a need is determined by the CB.

RSPO Certification Audits for P&C and ISH Standard

Since March 2020, the CBs are required to perform a combination of remote audit and on-site audits. The remote audit is used for the purpose of extending the PalmTrace license of the certified unit. A license for a new entity can only be requested when an on-site audit has been conducted. The time taken for the remote audit shall not exceed 30% of the total man-days as indicated in the commercial contract between the CB and the certificate holder or in the proposal made by the CB. The preliminary guidance for CBs was developed to this effect and the CBs are also encouraged to utilise various technology tools available during the remote audit.

With the current on-going pandemic, the RSPO Secretariat has identified the following audit scenarios that should take place **in order of priority**:

- Audit **Scenario 1 (for all types of audits & NPP verification)** – audits are carried out on-site by the CB’s audit team.
- Audit **Scenario 2 (for all types of audits & NPP verification)** – due to travel restriction, the CB’s audit team conducts a remote audit first and follows with an on-site audit once the travel restriction has been lifted.
- Audit **Scenario 3 (for all types of audits & NPP verification)** – due to travel restrictions, the CB’s audit team conducts a remote audit first and follows with an on-site audit with the assistance from a CB’s Audit Facilitator. The use of the CB’s Audit Facilitator shall be in accordance with the guidance document developed by RSPO.
- Audit **Scenario 4 (only for annual surveillance & recertification audits)** – due to an extended lockdown, restrictive quarantine procedures or the lack of an internet connection, the on-site audit for the current license year (e.g. year 2020) is not possible until the next license year (e.g. year 2021). For such cases:
 - Remote audit to be conducted by the audit team of the CB with a license extension every 3-months.
 - The CB is allowed to combine the year 2020 audit with the on-site audit in the year 2021. However, the sampling of audits is to be increased by 50% to cover the previous year audit samples (sites, records and interviews).
 - e.g. for a Unit of Certification with 16 estates, with a license valid until 1 April 2020, extended until 1 July 2020, and conducted remote audit in June 2020, the license can be extended until 1 Oct 2020. If the on-site audit is still not possible and the license can be further extended to 1 Jan 2021. If the on-site audit is only possible in March 2021, the following actions should be taken:
 - Extend the license from 1 Jan 2021 to April 2021
 - Last day possible to perform the on-site audit is 31 March 2021
 - The number of estates to be sampled should be six (6) estates [i.e. 4 + 2 from previous year sampling, where four (4) was the number of sites (sample) audited in the last audit]

RSPO Independent Smallholder (ISH) Standard

The Audit **Scenarios 1, 2 and 3** above are applicable for the audits against the RSPO ISH Standard. However, for the audit at the Eligibility Phase, the following can be applied:

Remote audit is allowed for certification of an ISH Group for the **Eligibility Phase** with the following additional measures as listed below:

1. Within 6-months of the certification, an on-site verification shall be conducted to verify the indicators that have been listed as high risk.
2. If a non-conformity is detected during on-site verification, the certification and PalmTrace license of the ISH group shall be immediately suspended pending closure of the non-conformity.
3. Addition of new members will not be allowed once an ISH group has been certified via remote audit. This can only be made once an on-site verification has been carried out.