BRC005: Global Standards Referral Process

1. Objectives

To maintain the integrity of the BRC certification schemes, the BRC has a referral process to provide a process for reporting and investigation of:

- Issues relating to certificated sites which appear not to be maintaining the requirements of a specific BRC Global Standard.
- Complaints against the performance of a Certification Body.

BRC actively encourages feedback as this provides valuable information of performance of Certification Bodies and operation of the Global Standards.

2. Procedure

2.1 Receipt of referrals

Any person having concerns regarding the status of a company's BRC certification or performance of a Certification Body may contact BRC in confidence.

A Standard Referral Notification form BRC002 is available, however, there shall be sufficient information provided to allow a meaningful investigation to take place. The key information required is:

- Name and address of certificated site
- Name of certification body
- Details of the concerns and the circumstances surrounding how these arose eg date of visit undertaken by you, whether this was announced/unannounced
- Details of whether these concerns would have been evident during the BRC audit or whether practices of the site have since changed

Initial contact should be made to the Compliance Manager for Global Standards at karen.betts@brc.org.uk or +44 (0) 207 854 8935.

In order to progress a referral there must be sufficient information to allow a thorough investigation, where the quality of information is not sufficient further information will be requested. If sufficient information is not provided the BRC will notify the Certification Body issuing the most recent certificate, however a full investigation may not be possible.

All referrals will be logged by the BRC to allow the progress of investigations to be tracked.

2.2 Notification to Certification Bodies

The Certification Body who issued the most recent certificate for the site will be contacted by the BRC within 2 working days of receipt of the full information on the referral.

The information will be provided as supplied (removing any identification as to source), to the responsible Certification Body only.

An initial response shall be expected by the BRC from the Certification Body within 10 working days and a full written response given after completion of a full and thorough investigation of the issues within 28 calendar days.

2.3 Action by Certification Bodies

The investigation by the Certification Body and response shall focus around two main areas:

1. Short falls in the initial audit process e.g. where this had failed to identify non-conformities in the sites operation of the Standard and where appropriate the corrective actions taken to address this within the Certification Body.

2. Action taken to review the certification status of the site concerned. This may be through documentation, discussion or a revisit (announced or unannounced as outlined with the relevant Standards protocols) as appropriate to the nature of the issues identified. The Certification Body shall:

   - Inform the site that a complaint has been made regarding their certification and make them aware of the referral procedure.

   - **Base any decision for action eg suspension or withdrawal of the certificate only on information gathered by the Certification Body and not directly from the referral.**

   - Make the site aware of the appeals procedure.

2.4 Action taken following receipt of the Certification Body report

The BRC will review the response from the Certification Body and where necessary discuss further any issues arising. Where further clarification of the original issues raised by the referrer are needed the BRC will discuss these with the parties concerned.

A summary of the investigation report and action taken by the Certification Body will be provided by the BRC to the person originally submitting the referral.

The BRC shall review all of the information provided and make a judgement on whether the referral indicates a fault with the Certification Body. Where the original referral information provided was insufficient to enable proper investigation the Certification Body will be notified of the issue but no conclusion can be made on the validity of the referral.

Where the investigation determines that there is fault with the Certification Body involved, the BRC will make their Accreditation Body aware of the faults in the Certification Bodies performance to enable further follow up as necessary by the Accreditation Body.

2.5 Summary and review of referrals

The BRC will maintain a log of all referrals and their outcome.

A summary report of the number of referrals received and their outcome will be provided for discussion at the relevant meetings such as the Technical Advisory Committee relevant to particular Standards. Details of the individual referrals, person referring the issue and Certification Body concerned will not be disclosed.

2.6 Sanctions against Certification Bodies

Where the referral process identifies significant or recurring failings within a Certification Body or where a Certification Body fails to investigate a referral, sanctions may be taken against the Certification Body in accordance with the BRC Framework agreement and BRC Requirements Document.

3 Confidentiality of Information

Information relating to referrals shall be maintained in strict confidence except as identified in the procedures above.

In particular information relating to the person submitting the referral shall not be disclosed unless requested by the person/company submitting the referral.

Details of the referral and site involved will not be disclosed to any other customers or users of the site concerned.

Details about the Certification Body concerned shall not be made available to other Certification Bodies, or users of the Standards.

Documentation provided to the BRC during the investigation eg audit report will not be provided to any other persons unless prior permission has been given by the documentation owner.

The BRC shall maintain files relating to the referral process as confidential files.