



## LEAF Marque Remote Audit Protocol

In order to ensure LEAF Marque certified businesses can continue to maintain their assurance status, LEAF Marque has developed the LEAF Marque Remote Audit Protocol to be implemented during the COVID-19 crisis. This ensures robust assessments of compliance, which support the credibility of the LEAF Marque System, can continue throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

The LEAF Marque Remote Audit Protocol will be implemented from the 1st May 2020. This aligns with the Interim COVID-19 Policy, in which the requirement for on-site LEAF Marque audits was temporarily suspended from the 25<sup>th</sup> March.

### Remote Auditing Process

#### **LEAF Marque certified businesses discuss audit arrangements with their Certification Body (CB).**

If the business wishes to continue with LEAF Marque certification but is unable to do so due to the impact of COVID-19, certificate extensions are available. This should be discussed with the CB to determine the appropriate time period of the extension. The CB will then send a certificate extension request to LEAF Marque, who can approve certification extensions for up to up to six months if sufficient evidence to demonstrate the impact of COVID-19 is provided. This aligns with clause 3.2 in the [LEAF Marque System Rules](#) (v4). Certificate extension requests cannot be made more than a month in advance of the certificate expiry date due to the rapidly changing nature of COVID-19 restrictions and limitations.

#### **CBs determine whether a remote audit is appropriate.**

CBs are responsible for assessing the capacity and risk of a remote audit on a case-by-case basis for each business. Reasons a remote audit would not be appropriate include, but are not limited to:

- The non-conformance or membership history of a LEAF Marque certified business is considered too high risk to conduct a remote audit.
- The business does not have access to or ability to use the technology required to conduct a robust remote audit.
- COVID-19 travel and social distancing restrictions are lifted during the extension period so that on-site audits are possible to safely complete.

New applicants to the LEAF Marque System are eligible for remote audits. However, this must be supplemented by an on-site verification assessment as soon as is safely possible (see **New Applicants - On-Site Verification**). Excluding certificate extensions and the CBs assessment criteria of risk which instead considers baseline system non-conformance history, all other procedures within this protocol apply.

#### **CBs discuss with businesses the appropriate format and scheduling of the remote audit.**

Following discussion between the CB and the business, the remote audit can be scheduled to occur during the certificate extension period, or during the normal audit schedule without a certification extension (if available and appropriate).

The auditor (or CB or LEAF Marque business, as appropriate) must contact the business and arrange a time for the remote audit. In addition to defining the date and time of the remote audit, a time-period in which the business must provide any relevant evidence prior to the audit must be defined.



Businesses should inform the CB of the technology available to them, in order for CBs to determine the appropriate format of the remote audit. The preferred format of a remote audit is a video call supplemented by the business providing documentary evidence. Any technology that can include at least 3 parties can be used in order to enable remote witnessing of audits – for example, WhatsApp Call, BlueJeans, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom. If this is not possible, the audit can involve a phone call supplemented by the business providing documentary and photo/video evidence.

LEAF Marque remote audits can occur as a stand-alone audit or at the same time as the LEAF Marque approved baseline certification system(s) audit, providing the baseline audit is also conducted remotely. In some instances, technology constraints may prevent joint audits taking place; CBs will inform members of this accordingly.

**Prior to the remote audit, the business uploads evidence via the LEAF Marque Data Room.**

The type and range of evidence uploaded by businesses will depend on whether the remote audit involves a video call or phone call, and the relevant verifications options available to each business. The time period the business must upload this information will be determined by the CB at the time of scheduling the remote audit.

The LEAF Marque Data Room has been designed to ensure data protection rights are maintained. Only the businesses CB, auditor, and LEAF Marque have access to the evidence uploaded, and the CB takes responsibility for ensuring access is appropriately managed. The assigned auditor will review the uploaded evidence prior to the remote audit in order to inform the conversation and enable the audit to be conducted as efficiently as possible.

**Auditors complete the remote audit**

Compliance against each Control Point is assessed by the combined evidence obtained from the video/phone call and the relevant information uploaded. This informs the certification decision, and as such, the remote audit results in completion of a recertification audit.

The certification decision and subsequent certification procedures are completed in the same way as on-site audits, as stated in the [LEAF Marque System Rules](#).

**New Applicants - On-Site Verification**

Following new LEAF Marque applicants' remote audits, an on-site verification assessment must be completed as soon as is safely possible. The auditor (or CB or LEAF Marque business, as appropriate) must contact the business and arrange a time for the on-site verification. The on-site verification will include assessment of Control Points that require observational evidence, in addition to other Control Points as necessary to verify the conclusions of the remote audit.

The auditor will determine whether the on-site verification can support the certification decision from the remote audit. If the auditor finds evidence to support a positive certification decision, the businesses LEAF Marque certificate remains valid and the certificate end date will not change. If the auditor identifies non-conformances against the LEAF Marque Standard, the certificate will immediately be suspended, and the business informed of the non-conformance. If the non-conformance is resolved with 28 days, the certificate status will be reinstated to 'current', with the existing certificate end date. If the non-conformance is not resolved within 28 days, the certificate will be withdrawn; another audit will be required to reapply for LEAF Marque certification.