

The Value of Third Party Certification

Of all conformity assessment procedures that give assurance that a product, process or service conforms to specified requirements (safety, health and the environment), third party certification provides the greatest value. Third party certification:

- Is independent,
- Is cost effective,
- Results in safer and more reliable products,
- Has immediate acceptance in the marketplace,
- Instills consumer confidence,
- Distinguishes manufacturers making compliant products, and
- Can aid in defense of a product liability action.

Each of these benefits is discussed in more detail below.

One of the key distinctions between third party certification and other forms of conformity assessment is independence. Third party certifiers provide an objective review of product safety and performance free from both the economic demands of the marketplace and internal company pressures because they have no financial interest in the sale of products. This ensures that products meet the specified requirements (relating to safety, health and the environment) to which they are being evaluated.

Third party certification is more cost effective than, for example, manufacturer's self-declaration of conformity (see ACIL position statement *infra*) or testing and evaluation by the purchaser. This is because manufacturers and purchasers need not buy the testing equipment or hire staff competent to perform the evaluation of the products. In addition, third parties can test and certify products more efficiently than manufacturers because they have the expertise and experience in providing this service. Additionally, competition among certifiers increases effectiveness and efficiency adding to the value of their certification programs. Finally, many governments recognize that private third party certification programs can save scarce resources and can help them meet their legislative and regulatory mandates.

Third party certification assures safer and more reliable products. Manufacturers generally use design engineers rather than safety engineers to design products. This can result in a product that performs well but may not comply with the safety, health or environmental standards or requirements. However, initial testing, coupled with audits of a manufacturer's facilities prior to certification by a third party ensure that the manufacturer is capable of meeting the specified requirements.

Products that are third party certified are accepted immediately in the marketplace. This is because consumers, retailers and distributors recognize, and have confidence in the third party certification mark on the product as an assurance of safety and performance.

Consumers are confident purchasing products that are third party tested and certified because of the surveillance and verification of continued compliance that third party certifiers provide once the product is placed on the market. Consumers also know that if there is a problem with the product there is a complaint handling system to ensure that unsafe products are identified and quickly removed from the marketplace.

Third party certification also distinguishes the manufacturers that make products that comply with specified requirements from those that do not. A consumer, looking at a product that is self declared to be compliant by the manufacturer and one that is third party certified, will not know what components have been used to build the product. The third party certification process ensures that correct components are used.

Third party certification also can be an aid in defense of a product liability action against the manufacturer. One of the standards that the courts use in determining liability is whether the manufacturer exercised the appropriate level of care in producing the product. Third party certification of a product demonstrates that the manufacturer took advantage of the highest degree of care available in the conformity assessment process to ensure safe and effective products are placed on the marketplace.

Independence, cost, safety and reliability, confidence, superior manufacturing and liability protection make third party certification the most valuable route to placing safe and effective products in the world marketplace.

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