Handling of Complaints and Appeals

This document provides APA's process for handling Complaints and Appeals.

Definitions

Complaint: A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, other than an appeal, submitted by any person or organization regarding APA's certification or inspection activities, certified products, certified clients, or APA personnel, where a response is expected.

Appeal: An appeal is a request by an applicant, client, or other party directly affected by an APA decision related to certification and/or inspection activities.

Purpose

APA is committed to maintaining the integrity, impartiality, and credibility of its certification and inspection programs. This document describes how complaints and appeals related to APA certification and inspection activities are received, evaluated, investigated, and resolved.
APA provides a fair, transparent, impartial, and confidential process for handling complaints and appeals.

Scope

This policy applies to complaints and appeals relating to:

- APA certification activities;
- APA inspection activities;
- Certified products;
- Certified clients;
- Decisions made by APA under its accredited certification and inspection programs; and
- The conduct of personnel, contractors, committees, or representatives performing certification or inspection activities on behalf of APA.

General Principles

Accessibility

This document describes how APA's complaints and appeals are handled and is available to any interested party upon request.

Impartiality

Complaints and appeals are reviewed impartially by personnel who were not involved in the activity or decision that is the subject of the complaint or appeal.

Confidentiality

All complaints and appeals are handled confidentially to the extent permitted by law and accreditation requirements.

Non-discrimination
Submission of a complaint or appeal shall not result in discriminatory, retaliatory, or prejudicial treatment of the complainant or appellant.

Responsibility
APA retains the responsibility for all decisions made throughout the complaint and appeal process, including activities performed by committees, personnel, or external resources action on behalf of APA.

Submitting a Complaint

Complaints may be submitted verbally or in writing to APA and need to include:

- Name and contact information of the complainant (NOTE: Complaints can be submitted anonymously)
- Description of the issue
- Relevant dates and supporting information
- The outcome being sought, if known.

Complaints may involve:

- APA certification or inspection activities;
- Certified products;
- Certified clients;
- Use or misuse of certification marks;
- APA personnel or representatives.
- Description of the issue

Complaint Handling Process

Acknowledgement
APA will acknowledge receipt of a complaint within five (5) working days.

Evaluation
APA will determine:

- Whether the complaint relates to activities for which APA is responsible
- Whether the complaint is valid; and
- Whether additional information is required.

Investigation
APA will gather and verify information necessary to evaluate the complaint and determine appropriate actions.
Where a complaint concerns a certified client or certified product, APA may notify the client and request relevant information or a response.

Resolution
APA will communicate the results of the complaint investigation to the complainant upon completion of the review.
Where required, APA shall implement corrective actions or other actions necessary to resolve the complaint.

Closure
APA will provide formal notification of the outcome and closure of the complaint process.

Handling Complaints against APA through its Accreditation Body

Standards Council of Canada (SCC) – ISO/IEC 17065

SCC will accept complaints against an organization accredited by SCC (APA).

To process a complaint to SCC regarding APA you must submit the complaint first to APA and provide APA with the opportunity to address it through our complaint process. NOTE: SCC will not process a complaint until the accredited organization has had the opportunity to address it.

ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB) – ISO/IEC 17020

ANAB will accept complaints against an organization accredited by ANAB (APA).

According to ANAB – If the issue is about an ANAB accredited organization, you should first raise the complaint with that organization. ANAB will require this step before accepting the complaint.

Submitting an Appeal

A party directly affected by an APA certification or inspection decision may submit a written appeal. Appeals must be submitted in writing within 30 calendar days of the decision being appealed.

All appeals need to be sent to:
APA – The Engineered Wood Association
Attention: Charles Hartke, Vice President Quality Services Division
7011 S. 19th Street
Tacoma, WA 98466

Appeals may be related to:

- Certification decisions;
- Suspension decisions;
- Withdrawal decisions;
- Scope reductions;
- Inspection determinations;
- Corrective action requirements; or
- Other formal APA decisions.

Appeals need to identify:

- The decision being appealed;
- The reason for the appeal;
- Supporting information;

Appeal Handling Process

Acknowledgement

APA will acknowledge receipt of an appeal within five (5) working days.

Validation

APA will determine:

- Whether the appeal relates to an APA decision;
- Whether the appellant is directly affected by the decision; and
- Whether the appeal contains sufficient information to proceed.

Review

APA will gather and verify all information necessary to evaluate the appeal.
The appeal shall be reviewed by individuals who were not involved in making the original decision.

Decision
The appeal shall be evaluated objectively and an appeal decision rendered based upon the evidence presented.

Notification
APA will provide written notification of:

- The appeal decision;
- The rationale supporting the decision; and
- Closure of the appeal process

Escalation of Appeals and Final Appeal Review
If the appellant is not satisfied with the outcome of the initial appeal review, the appellant may submit a written request for further review to the Vice President Quality Services Division within thirty (30) days of notification of the initial appeal decision.

The appeal will be reviewed by the Executive Review Committee for final internal review and decision. Individuals involved in the original decision, or appeal review shall not participate in the final internal review and decision of the appeal. The Executive Review Committee shall review all relevant information and issue a final internal appeal decision.

External Appeals Related to Accreditation Requirements
Standards Council of Canada (SCC)
For appeals involving APA's compliance with accreditation requirements, accreditation criteria, or the application of accreditation requirements under APA's SCC-accredited certification programs, SCC serves as the final level of appeal.

Before requesting SCC review, the appellant shall first utilize and exhaust APA's internal appeal process, including review by the Executive Review Committee. APA will provide the appellant with information regarding the SCC appeal process upon request.

If the appellant remains dissatisfied following APA's final internal appeal decision and the matter relates to APA's conformance with SCC accreditation criteria, the appellant may submit the appeal directly to SCC for review in accordance with SCC's established procedures. APA shall inform affected clients and appellants that SCC is the final level of appeal for disputes regarding APA's conformance with accreditation criteria.

APA shall cooperate fully with SCC during any review or investigation related to such appeals and shall abide by all SCC decisions pertaining to accreditation criteria.

The submission of an appeal to SCC does not suspend or invalidate APA decisions unless otherwise directed by SCC or required by applicable accreditation requirements.

Records

APA maintains records of complaints, appeals, investigations, decisions, and resulting actions in accordance with its document and record retention policies.

Contact Information
Complaints and Appeals

Vice President Quality Services Division
APA – The Engineered Wood Association
7011 So. 19th Street
Tacoma, WA 98466
Phone (253) 565-6600
Website: www.apawood.org

Written complaints and appeals may be submitted by mail, email, or other methods accepted by APA.