



Compost Certification Scheme
Independent audits of CCS Appointed Laboratories
Summary report 2015

In 2015 Renewable Energy Assurance Ltd (REAL) introduced Independent Audits of the laboratories appointed under the Compost Certification Scheme (CCS, the Scheme). This was a very important milestone and marked a significant improvement to the robustness of the Scheme. The main purpose of these audits was to ensure that certified compost producers receive reliable sets of test results which they can use with confidence to demonstrate compliance with PAS100. The CCS is currently working with four laboratories:

Alliance Technical Laboratories Limited

Eurofins Laboratories Limited

D&F Associates Limited

Natural Resource Management Limited

These laboratories have been providing compost testing under the Scheme for many years. They were officially appointed by REAL in January 2015 when they agreed to comply with a new set of terms and conditions (T&Cs) at all times. They include performance and compliance criteria; provisions for sample transport, storage and preparation; participation in inter-laboratory trials, spot checks and reporting of test results. These T&Cs are a condition of appointment.

Independent Audits 2015

In 2015 the independent audits were carried out by a team of specialists from Herriot-Watt University (HWU) and Scottish Water. The team was led by Dr Thomas Aspray at HWU.

The audits took place in summer and autumn 2015. The independent auditor visited all sites involved in compost testing for PAS100 certification purposes. This included premises of the appointed laboratory and any sub-contractors they were working with. The auditors reviewed each laboratories' Quality Management Systems (QMS), made sure that each laboratories' Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) followed the test methods specified in PAS100, and that the training records were up to date and complaints had been investigated. The auditor has also checked experimental setups and witnessed implementation of a number of test methods, paying particular attention to 'non-standard' tests (compost stability, physical contaminants and plant response test). The storage conditions, turnaround and accuracy of results reports were also examined.

Following the visits each of the Appointed Laboratories received an Audit Report which confirmed any non-conformances identified during the course of the audit requiring mandatory action by the laboratory. These non-conformances included:

- lack of robust arrangements between the Appointed laboratory and its sub-contractors;
- delays in sending test results reports to the operators and responding to complaints;
- poor quality of QMS documents.

The laboratories were required to respond to the Audit report in a timely manner, and agree with the auditor a list of suitable corrective actions to address these non-conformances. The audits were completed by the end of December 2015, at which point REAL received recommendation letters from the auditors.

Outcome

The auditor supported REAL's decision to renew the appointment of three laboratories as REAL CCS Laboratories for 2016. The auditor stated, 'Based on the information subsequently provided, our assessment is that these non-conformances have been satisfactorily addressed, or will be within appropriately agreed timescales'. In the case of the fourth laboratory, the auditor did not support renewal of the appointment since it had not fully resolved a number of identified non-conformances. These related to the laboratory's documents and communication with its sub-contractors, operators and the auditors. Having considered the position very carefully and in consultation with the auditor REAL required the laboratory to take immediate action if it was to maintain its appointment under the CCS. REAL required the laboratory to address all the outstanding non-conformances within a very short timescale, and liaised with the auditor to arrange further spot visits. Following the additional checks the auditor was confident that the laboratory has made robust changes to its operations.

On this basis, we are pleased to say that REAL decided to renew the appointment of the fourth laboratory as a CCS Appointed laboratory for 2016.

Lesson Learnt

The independent audits were a very useful exercise. In particular they brought to light a number of issues, for example testing capacity at the CCS Appointed laboratories and gave the laboratories the opportunity to fine tune their practice

We have already updated the [Complaints pages](#) on the CCS web site which now include information about raising complaints against the CCS Appointed Laboratories. Contact details have been provided for each laboratory, and we request that you copy us in to these emails using the email address info@qualitycompsot.org.uk

Later in year REAL is planning to monitor testing capacity of all the CCS Appointed Laboratories.

The independent audits will be repeated in 2016.