



Compost Certification Scheme
Independent audits of CCS Appointed Laboratories
Summary report 2016

Renewable Energy Assurance Ltd (REAL) introduced Independent Audits of the Appointed Laboratories in 2015. Following the success and notable improvements effected in the first round, a second round of laboratory audits took place in 2016. The four laboratories appointed to carry out testing of compost under the Compost Certification Scheme (CCS) and audited last year are:

Alliance Technical Laboratories Limited

Eurofins Agro Testing UK Ltd Limited

D&F Associates Limited

Natural Resource Management Limited

The first round of audits highlighted a comparatively large number of non-conformances in which the laboratories' work was not aligned with the Terms and Conditions first issued in 2015. These non-conformances included; poor quality of QMS documents, and lack of robust arrangements between the Appointed Laboratory and its sub-contractors. However, since addressing these issues in the first round, the laboratories have shown significant improvements across all aspects of their PAS100 compost testing work.

Independent Audits 2016

In 2016 the independent audits were carried out by a team of specialists from Herriot-Watt University (HWU), led by Dr Thomas Aspray. The team are highly professional and produce very detailed reports. REAL has confidence in their assessment and the laboratories have also remarked upon their professionalism.

The audits took place in summer and autumn 2016. The audit round consisted of a pre-audit document inspection and site visits for all laboratories (including sub-contractors) involved in compost testing for PAS100 certification purposes. 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:

- Incomplete training records;
- Lack of internal audit plans;
- SOPs not updated.

The non-conformances were more minor in nature compared to the non-conformances flagged up in 2015 and there were fewer of them. 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. Most of them could be rectified in a relatively short timeframe with simple solutions and were not likely to impact on the reliability of PAS100 test results. The audits were completed by the end of December 2016, at which point REAL received recommendation letters from the auditors. Areas of improvement since the last round included:

- Test scheduling has improved for subcontracted laboratories;
- Improvements made with amendments to laboratory worksheets;
- Greatly strengthened quality management system.

Outcome

The auditor supported REAL's decision to renew the appointment of three laboratories as REAL CCS Laboratories for 2016. One laboratory was late with providing a list of satisfactory corrective actions to address outstanding non-conformances within agreed timeframes. However, 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'. We are pleased to say, all four laboratories were reappointed under the Compost Certification Scheme from January to December 2017.

Laboratory applications

REAL has published guidance and an Application Form on the CCS website for laboratories wishing to apply to become appointed under the Scheme. One laboratory applied to be appointed in 2016. The laboratory was required to carry out testing on three different samples collected/delivered by three different certified compost producers. The independent auditor visited the laboratory and assessed their quality management system (QMS); technical and support staff competency; recent and relevant compost results using PAS100 methods; testing equipment; test and storage facility capacity. Unfortunately, the independent auditor discovered many areas of weakness including; lack of a robust QMS, aspects of certain test methods missing, and limited experience and expertise. Utilising these findings and the auditor's recommendation, REAL decided not to appoint the laboratory – the application was unsuccessful.

Lessons learnt

The laboratories are highly competent and cooperative – they are prepared to adapt their practices in order to ensure compliance with our Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) – this is also evident through our discussions and meetings. The laboratories have significantly improved their practices since the audits began in 2015.

However, we are in the process of reviewing the T&Cs and these audits highlighted potential areas for change and improvement – exploring more proficiency testing schemes, for example.

The independent audits will continue in 2017.