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1.0 OVERVIEW

level® is a product certification program sponsored by the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) International. BIFMA provides and maintains the level® Certification Program and develops (through the ANSI consensus process) standards to define and measure the sustainable attributes of furniture products. BIFMA requires all products bearing the level® certification mark to be assessed for conformance to the ANSI/BIFMA e3 standard by a recognized third-party product certification body. Product certification bodies will certify that products conform to the standard and authorize the use of the level® Certification Mark in conjunction with the certified product.

The international criteria for the accreditation of product certification bodies operating product certification programs (tangible products, processes, and services) are detailed in ISO/IEC 17065, General requirements for bodies operating product certification systems.

The requirements of this level® certification scheme are applicable to the product certification bodies. The level® requirements applicable to manufacturers are outlined in Appendix C of the level® Certification Program guidelines. Figure A-1 illustrates key elements of this product certification process and the relationships between BIFMA, the accreditation organization, the product certification body(ies), and applicant organizations.

Certification by a product certification body is not a statement that the product certification body guarantees the efficiency and performance of a level® labeled product. It is also not a guarantee that all of the aspects of the level® standard are being met or will continue to be met, at all times. The certification and labeling of a product for level® is a statement that the applicant organization's products have been produced in accordance with the level® standard, and that the validation and verification of conformance to the level® standard has been evaluated and determined to meet the necessary requirements by a recognized third-party certification body.

2.0 TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

2.1 Scope

This level® certification scheme specifies the minimum requirements that product certification bodies shall observe when operating a third-party verification of product conformance program to the level® standard and authorizing the use of the level® certification mark. It provides guidance on the use of ISO/IEC 17065 to satisfy the requirements implicit in the certification of products for level® and provides the basis for consistent application of level® certification by product certification bodies. This document, with respect to the certification and labeling of products for level®, shall be read in conjunction with ISO/IEC 17065. Where there is conflict between ISO/IEC 17065 and the level® certification scheme, the level® certification scheme will take precedence.

2.2 References

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this level® certification scheme. Undated references indicate that the latest edition of the referenced document applies.

- level® standard (ANSI/BIFMA e3) developed and maintained by BIFMA and NSF International.
- Approved consensus credit interpretations document.
- Approved but not yet published credit changes.
- level® certification program guidelines developed and maintained by BIFMA.
- ISO/IEC 17065, Conformity assessment - Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services.
- IAF Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC 17065.
- ISO/IEC 17000, Conformity assessment - Vocabulary and general principles.
- ISO/IEC 17011, Conformity assessment - General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies.
- ISO/IEC 17020, Conformity assessment – Requirements for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection.
- ISO/IEC 17021, Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems.
- ISO/IEC 17025, General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories.

3.0 RECOGNITION & REQUIREMENTS OF THE PRODUCT CERTIFICATION BODY

All level® program certification bodies are required to attain program accreditation through an Accrediting Body (AB) that is an International Accreditation Forum (IAF) Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MRA) signatory organization. The level certification scheme shall be included within the scope of the certification body's ISO/IEC 17065 accreditation.

The certification body shall employ, or have access to, a sufficient number of personnel to cover its operations related to the certification schemes and to the applicable standards and other normative documents. The certification body shall establish, implement and maintain a procedure for management of competencies of personnel involved in the certification process. The procedure shall require the certification body to: determine the criteria for the competence of personnel for each function in the certification process, taking into account the requirements of the schemes; and identify training needs and provide, as necessary, training programs on certification processes, requirements, methodologies, activities and other relevant certification scheme requirements.

When a certification body performs evaluation activities, it shall meet the applicable requirements of the relevant International Standards. For testing, it shall meet the applicable requirements of ISO/IEC 17025; for inspection, it shall meet the applicable requirements of ISO/IEC 17020; and for management system auditing, it shall meet the applicable requirements of ISO/IEC 17021. The certification body shall outsource

evaluation activities only to entities that meet the applicable requirements of the relevant International Standards.

4.0 PRODUCT CERTIFICATION SCHEME

4.1 Application for Product Certification

Applicant organizations seeking level® certification and the level® mark for their products must apply directly to a product certification body that is recognized for the level® program. Application shall be made on a form supplied by the product certification body and shall document the applicant organizations identity, the product identity, and help to define the scope of certification.

The application shall define the specific product or group of products for which certification is requested by the applicant, as well as the version of the standard the product will be evaluated against.

The applicant organization should be the company/brand associated with the product being marketed.

4.1.1 Declaration of Standard Version (rev. date)

All level® applications and resulting certificates must identify the standard against which the product was evaluated and certified including the version and date of issue.

4.1.2 New Versions and Effective Date

For initial product certifications from applicants that do not have other currently certified products, a newly released version of the e3 standard can be used for certification immediately upon publication of that revision; or an applicant could choose to use the previous version for up to 12 months after the release date of a new version (providing a 3rd version is not released within that 12-month period). Application for initial product certification to a new version of the standard is required no later than 12 months after the date of issue, i.e. the “mandatory effective date”; at which point the previous version of the standard will no longer be available for initial product certifications.

Products submitted for certification after the date of issue of a revision and prior to the mandatory effective date may be evaluated against either version of the standard. However, there will be no more than 2 versions of the standard available for certification at any one time, (in the event that three versions of the standard happen to be issued within a 12-month period).

Applicants that have previously certified products under the level system could choose to add new products to the scope of an existing certification. However, the addition of any new products to the scope of an existing certification shall not extend the existing certification expiration date. Upon application for recertification, a current version of the standard must be used for product assessment.

Products must be evaluated fully against the selected version of the standard. Applicants can not "cherry pick" some credits from one version and other credits from another version even if both versions may be "in effect" at the time.

4.1.3
Approved, but Unpublished Changes
Applicants may choose to utilize credit changes that have been approved by the consensus body (Joint Committee) through issue papers, but have not yet been published in a forthcoming version of the standard. BIFMA will maintain an active list of "approved, but not yet published" changes that can be utilized at the discretion of the applicant. By utilizing approved, but unpublished changes, it is assumed that the applicant will pursue certification to the version of the standard that these approved changes appear in immediately upon publication.

4.1.4 Surveillance Audits (also see section 4.10)
Surveillance audits shall be conducted against the version of the standard that the product was initially certified against, even in cases where a new version of the standard may be in effect. Upon application for recertification, the product must be evaluated against a current version of the standard.

An applicant may chose to reapply for certification to a new version of the standard at any point during the certification term; i.e. they do not have to wait until the end of the 3-year certification term to apply to be evaluated to a newer version.

4.1.5 Extension
Certification bodies may petition BIFMA for an extension of the allowable use time for a particular version due to unusual circumstances.

4.2 Certification
4.2.1 General
The product certification body shall comply with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17065. Upon confirmation of the acceptance of the application, the product certification body shall make the necessary arrangements with the applicant organization for the certification in accordance with this level® certification scheme. The comprehensive review of objective evidence shall include an onsite evaluation.

4.2.2 Organization Evaluation
The product certification body shall conduct a comprehensive review of objective evidence to ensure conformance to the organizational requirements of the standard for purposes of initial certification and at least every three years thereafter. The scope of the organizational credit review includes the applicant organization (who's brand is associated with the product being reviewed and marketed).

4.2.3 Facility Evaluation
The product certification body shall conduct a comprehensive review of objective evidence to ensure conformance to the facility related requirements of the standard for purposes of initial certification and approximately every three years thereafter.

Onsite audits are required for all facilities where final assembly of the product(s) to be assessed occurs and must be completed per the following certification terms:

- Initial Certification - All facilities must be visited prior to issuance of initial certification.
- Renewal Certification - All facilities must be visited prior to issuance of the renewal certification.
- Expansion of Certification Scope - New facility(s) added to the scope of an existing product certification, a document review shall be completed to approve the expansion of scope prior to issuance of the certification. An onsite audit must be completed prior to the next certification renewal.

Renewal onsite audits may be exempt if facility meets any of the following:

- Achieves 5 or less related facility points
- Has 10 or less full time employees

The certification body may elect to suspend travel by its representatives to a specific geographical location or region as the result of official travel warnings, advisories, or other health and safety concerns including, but not limited to, civil unrest, personal security, and risk of communicable disease.

When this occurs, the certification body shall notify the applicant organization of the alternate measures necessary in order for the CB to verify compliance during the period in which audits are not possible. These measures may include, but are not limited to:

- Identification and use of alternate sampling locations;
- Submittal of production, shipping, and quality control records;
- Submittal of material and formulation records; or
- Submittal of quality control manual.

Additionally, the level® certificate listing of certified products from the affected facility shall include the following footnote:
Note: <insert CB name> has not conducted production control audits at this facility. Product Listing is based on <state methods used>.

The period of travel suspension shall not last longer than five years. If the travel suspension cannot be lifted within the five-year period, the facility related credits dependent on that manufacturing site shall be withdrawn.

When the certification body determines that the travel suspension is no longer warranted, the applicant organization shall be notified that the travel suspension has been lifted and that audits will again be conducted.

4.2.4 Product Evaluation
4.2.4.1 Evaluation
The product certification body shall complete a comprehensive review of objective evidence to ensure conformance to the product related requirements of the standard for purposes of initial certification and at least every three years thereafter.

4.2.4.2 Evaluation Report
The product certification body shall inform the applicant via a full report on the outcome of the evaluation. The report shall include the total number of points accumulated by the product(s) being evaluated, the total number of product related points amassed, and the specific credits/points achieved. The conformance designation shall be stated as follows:

level® 1	32 to 44 total points; at least 5 of which are product related points
level® 2	45 to 62 total points; at least 11 of which are product related points
level® 3	63 to total maximum points; at least 18 of which are product related points

The certification body shall ensure its certification agreement requires that the client comply with the following: if the client provides copies of certification documentation and/or certificates to others, those documents shall be reproduced in their entirety.

4.3 Licensing
4.3.1 Certification Mark License Agreement (between Product Certification Body and BIFMA)
The product certification body shall sign the Certification Mark License Agreement, in the form attached as Appendix B, with BIFMA prior to receiving recognition to certify and label products for level®. This license agreement provides the conditions for authorizing the use of the level® certification mark by applicant organizations for certified products.

As part of the responsibilities for certifying products and authorizing the use of the level® certification mark, the product certification body shall:

- Provide BIFMA with data on certified products. Product certification bodies shall maintain a listing of all level® labeled products on their respective Web sites. In addition, product certification bodies shall maintain accurate and up-to-date information regarding level® certified products on BIFMA's searchable product database. The data shall be provided in the standardized format established by BIFMA for compatibility with the level® product database. The data provided to BIFMA shall include:
    - applicant organization’s identity and an individual’s contact information
    - product identity, and information regarding the scope of certification
    - certification body name
    - certification/certificate number
    - certification date and expiration date
    - URL link to a downloadable certificate
    - version/revision level of the standard the product was evaluated to
    - specific credit attainment information

- Notify BIFMA of any level® mark withdrawals, or mark misuse and dispute actions. BIFMA will rely on the product certification bodies to address product nonconformance, mark misuse, and dispute resolution. Accordingly, product certification bodies shall provide BIFMA with notification of any level® mark withdrawals, within 30 days of occurrence.

- Allow BIFMA to accompany accreditation organization on routine assessments. BIFMA reserves the right, for BIFMA staff or agents acting on behalf of BIFMA, to accompany the accreditation organization on any routine or follow-up assessments of the product certification body's accreditation as it relates to the level® program.

4.3.2 Certification Mark Authorization (between Product Certification Body and Applicant Organization)
When the certification decision has been made, the product certification body shall provide a certification decision to the applicant organization and authorize the use of the level® certification mark in conjunction with that certified product or group of products, in accordance with the certification mark license agreement (between the product certification body and BIFMA) and this level® certification scheme.

The product certification body shall monitor that the applicant organization of a level® labeled product abides by the policies outlined in the level® certification mark use guidelines.

Allow BIFMA to accompany certification bodies on routine assessments. BIFMA reserves the right, for BIFMA staff or agents acting on behalf of BIFMA, to accompany the certification body on any routine or follow-up assessments of the applicant organization as it relates to the level® program.

4.4 Appeals to the Product Certification Body
The product certification body shall exercise an appeals procedure in accordance with ISO/IEC 17065.

4.5 Confidentiality
The product certification body shall establish confidentiality procedures in accordance with ISO/IEC 17065.

4.6 Use of the level® Certification Mark
The product certification body shall provide a unique identifier to be displayed in conjunction with the level® certification mark. The identifier shall be the product certification body's registered name or official acronym and shall be formatted and positioned to the right of the level® certification mark. The identifier shall be legible and shall be no taller than the height of the level® certification mark itself. BIFMA will provide to the product certification body a copy of the mark the product certification body shall authorize applicant organizations to use in conjunction with level® labeled products.

The product certification body shall provide to the applicant organization of a certified product, the appropriate level® certification mark artwork and shall monitor that the applicant organization applies and uses the level® certification mark in accordance with the level® certification mark guidelines. Use of the level® certification mark by an applicant organization is voluntary.

4.7 Publicity About a level® Labeled Product
The applicant organization of a certified product shall have the right to publish the fact that it has been authorized to apply the level® certification mark on products to which the certification applies. The certification mark may be used in promotional literature published about the product by the applicant organization, its wholesalers, distributors, or retailers, as long as it is in direct correlation to the product. The level® certification mark must not be used to signify level® labeling of every product from the applicant organization and may never be used to imply direct endorsement of an applicant organization or product by BIFMA.

The appropriate product certification body shall assist BIFMA in monitoring that the relevant applicant organization(s) adhere(s) to the policies outlined in the level® certification mark use guidelines.

4.8 Misuse of the Certification or level® Certification Mark
The product certification body shall take appropriate action when an applicant organization of a product it has certified engages in unauthorized, incorrect, or misleading use of the certification or level® mark, whether it is discovered by the product certification body or is brought to its attention. Circumstances for unauthorized, incorrect, or misleading use of the certification or level® mark are described in the level® program guidelines and the level® certification mark guidelines.

The product certification body shall bring to BIFMA's attention, any instances of unauthorized use of a level® certification mark by an applicant organization of a product that has not been certified. BIFMA will engage in appropriate action with the infringing organization.

4.9 Extending a Certification
Applicant organizations shall apply to the product certification body to obtain an extension of an existing certification for additional types or models of products, or intended modifications to previously certified models. The product certification body, based on engineering judgment, shall determine if the additional types or models of products are significantly different than the products covered by the existing certification, to the extent that the modifications to the design would impact conformance to the level® specification. Based on this determination, the product certification body shall decide whether to require additional conformance evaluation. The engineering judgment must be documented and subjected to peer review by a technically competent person.

4.10 Transfer of Certification
The transfer of a product certification is defined as the recognition of an existing and valid product certification, granted by one accredited certification body (“issuing certification body”), by another accredited certification body (“accepting certification body”), for the purpose of becoming the certification body of record.

The accepting certification body should carry out a review of the certification of the prospective client following the same auditing schedule as the issuing certification body.

The issuing certification body shall honor its certification for 12 months from the date of the previous audit/surveillance report unless the client has requested a shorter time frame.

Only a valid accredited certification should be transferred. In cases where certification has been granted by a certification body that has ceased operating or whose accreditation has expired, been suspended or withdrawn, the accepting certification body may consider such a certification transfer at its discretion.

4.11 Surveillance

The product certification body shall, on an annual basis, complete a surveillance audit of the applicant organization. The purpose of this audit shall be to verify that the applicant organization continues to operate in a manner that will maintain a product's conformance with the standard. The scope of the audit shall include:

- Evaluate proper use of the level® certification mark.
- Evaluate conformance to all prerequisites in the standard.
- Evaluate conformance to an appropriate representative sample of the optional credits in the standard.
- Consider changes to the applicant organization's operations and certified products that may impact a product's conformance with the standard. If significant changes have not occurred, an onsite audit is not required.

4.12 Use of the level® Certification Mark on Products During a Probationary Period

The product certification body shall determine when probationary use of the level® certification mark may be warranted due to product nonconformance, improper use of the level® certification mark, or infringement of the level® certification scheme. Probationary use of the mark is allowed for a limited period of time as specified by the product certification body.

The product certification body shall inform the applicant organization of the conditions under which the probationary level certification status can be removed (e.g., corrective actions that shall be taken). At the end of the probation period, the product certification body shall investigate whether the indicated conditions for reinstating the level® certification mark have been fulfilled. Upon receiving proof of fulfillment of these conditions, the product certification body shall notify the applicant organization that the probationary use has been removed. If at the end of the probation period, the indicated conditions for removing the probationary status have not been fulfilled, a withdrawal of the certification mark shall be considered.

4.13 Withdrawal of the level® Certification Mark from Products

In more severe or repeated instances of product non-conformity, misuse of the level® certification mark, or failure to meet the requirements for removal of probationary level® certification mark status, the product certification body shall withdraw a products' certification and the use of the level® certification mark. The product certification body shall inform the applicant organization that the certification and level® certification mark are being withdrawn via a withdrawal notification. If the level® certification mark is withdrawn from a product for any reason, the product certification body shall direct the

applicant organization to notify its wholesalers, distributors, and retailers to immediately cease to use the certification mark in conjunction with that product, and the mark is to be eliminated from product packaging/promotional materials within six months from the date of withdrawal notification. The product certification body shall immediately notify BIFMA of any product withdrawals.

When issues related to product non-conformity or improper use of the level® certification mark come to the attention of BIFMA, BIFMA shall notify the appropriate product certification body of the product in question. The product certification body shall then engage in investigation and resolution of the complaint. Any evaluations, reviews or decisions needed to withdraw / suspend, shall be in accordance with ISO/IEC 17065 and the product certification body's policies and procedures.

4.14 Records Retention
The certification body shall retain records to demonstrate that all certification process requirements have been effectively fulfilled. If re-certifications are done on a determined cycle, then records shall be retained at least for the current and previous cycle. Otherwise, records shall be retained for a period defined by the certification body but not less than six years.

4.15 Amendments to these Rules of Procedure
BIFMA reserves the right to amend these rules of procedure which may include amending the level® certification scheme, the level® program guidelines, or revising the level® standard.

Revised:
April 15, 2013 (Sections 4.1.2 and 4.1.3)
May 14, 2015 (per ISO/IEC 17065)
April 4, 2017 (Section 3.0, IAF MRA Signatory Organizations)
April 5, 2017 (Section 4.3.1, Certification Mark License Agreement)