level® Certification Program Guidelines

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April 4, 2017 (Section II, A. - IAF MRA Signatory Organizations)
I. General Information
A. Overview
level® is a product certification program sponsored by the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) International. BIFMA requires all products bearing the level certification mark to be assessed for conformance to the ANSI/BIFMA e3 standard by an accredited 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.

B. Roles and Functions
BIFMA provides and maintains the level certification mark and develops American National Standards (through ANSI) for evaluating the sustainable attributes of furniture products; specifically ANSI/BIFMA e3. Manufacturers develop and evaluate products to the standard and promote and distribute them to customers. As an approved American National Standard, ANSI/BIFMA e3 is available for numerous types of conformance claims; including first-party (the producer), second-party (the customer or one with a financial stake) and/or third-party. In the case of level, only accredited and licensed third-party certification bodies can authorize the use of the level certification mark following an evaluation of the products and processes of an applicants products relative to the requirements of the standard. Following are the roles anticipated for each party.

BIFMA: Sponsors level certification program, promotes the level certification mark, updates stakeholders on the program, develops product standards (through ANSI), licenses application of the certification mark to certification bodies, maintains a Web registry of labeled products, and monitors usage of the level program certification mark.

ANSI: Develops procedures for the development of open, consensus standards, accredits standards developers, approves final standards, audits standards developers, and hears appeals. Also audits and accredits third-party certification programs to ISO/IEC 17065.

Certification Bodies: Operate and maintain certification programs that meet level criteria and ISO/IEC 17065, evaluate product/processes to the standard, promote level program awareness, maintain a Web registry of labeled products, monitor usage of the level program certification mark, and notify BIFMA regarding labeled products.

Manufacturers (companies that produce products that meet level standard): Design and produce products certified to level criteria, advertise/promote level labeled products.

C. Certification Process Flow Diagram
See Figure A-1 (next page)
II. Items for Certification Bodies

A. General Process for Certification Bodies
Specifics are defined in the Certification Scheme (Appendix A)
  • Certification body applies to an Accrediting Body (AB) that is an International Accreditation Forum (IAF) Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MRA) signatory organization for recognition under the program.
  • Certification body processes must be consistent with ISO/IEC 17065 and the level certification scheme (see Appendix A).
  • Once accredited, BIFMA and the certification body execute a Licensing Agreement (see Appendix B) authorizing the certification body to award use of/apply the level certification mark to conforming product. The level program website will include a listing of certification bodies authorized to evaluate product and apply the level certification mark.
  • For any products it has certified, the certifying body will perform ongoing surveillance of proper level certification mark use in the marketplace, proper reference to the certification mark in any promotional materials, and for continued assessment of product conformance to the level standard.
  • The certifying body shall maintain a listing of all level labeled products on its Web site.

B. Certification Scheme
See Appendix A

C. Certification Mark License Agreement
See Appendix B

D. Certification Mark Authorization
See Appendix C
III. Product Standard – ANSI/BIFMA e3

BIFMA and NSF develop the product standards through the ANSI consensus process. The standard outlines the various attributes of products that are allowed to bear the level certification mark.

Reference ANSI/BIFMA e3 (latest version) under separate file for specific requirements.
IV. Items for Applicant Organizations

A. General

BIFMA invites applicant organizations that wish to have their products evaluated against sustainability criteria to participate in the level product certification program. Accredited certification bodies authorized to evaluate products and apply the level certification mark are listed on the level web site (www.levelcertified.org). The following briefly outlines the expectations of the parties.

Expectations from an Applicant Organization:

- Promote the value of sustainability and level labeled products
- Sell, market, and promote level labeled products
- Train staff on the level program
- Adhere to certification mark use guidelines
- Allow BIFMA to promote applicant’s participation in program

Expectations from BIFMA:

- Develop and maintain national standards for furniture sustainability
- Increase awareness of sustainability and the level program
- Provide current level program news
- Provide materials, templates, and marks for promotional use
- Review level promotional materials as requested
- Provide tools for training sales staff on level program

B. Selection of an Accredited Certifying Body

In order to use the level certification mark on products, applicant organizations must have their products certified for conformance to the level standard by an accredited certifying body. BIFMA maintains a list of accredited certification bodies at the level website <www.levelcertified.org>

C. Product Certification and Labeling

Achieving and using the level certification mark in conjunction with products is contingent upon product certification and ongoing assessment of product conformance by a certification body. Figure A-1 portrays the key elements of the product certification process and the relationships between BIFMA, the accredited certifying body, and the applicant organization.

i. Application Submission to a Certifying Body

Applicant organizations must select and submit an application to a product certification body that is accredited to certify products to the level program. Each certifying body will have its own application and application procedures. The certifying body selected should be contacted directly for more information.

ii. Product Evaluation

The certifying body will evaluate, and certify products in accordance with the existing certification scheme and the ANSI/BIFMA e3 standard.
iii. Authorization to Use the level® Certification Mark
Once the certification body has certified that the product conforms to the level standard, it will provide the applicant organization authorization to use the level certification mark in conjunction with the certified product or group of products. The certifying body shall provide to the applicant organization of a certified product(s) the appropriate graphic artwork of the level certification mark, which has been approved in advance by BIFMA for use by that certifying body. Once the use of the level certification mark has been authorized, the applicant organization is allowed to properly label a product that conforms to the level standard and use the level mark in promotional materials directly related to the certified product(s). The applicant organization shall at all times use the level mark in accordance with the level® Certification Program Guidelines and level® Certification Mark Use Guidelines (section V).

iv. level® Labeled Product Registry
BIFMA will maintain an updated list of level labeled products at <www.levelcertified.org>. The certification body shall inform BIFMA when a new product or product model has been certified and when products are discontinued and are no longer labeled. The certifying body will also maintain a listing of all level labeled products on its Web site. BIFMA will periodically review the information contained in this listing in order to maintain an accurate registry of level labeled products on the level Web site.

v. Ongoing Surveillance
The appropriate certifying body will monitor the applicant organization’s proper mark use in the marketplace, proper reference to the mark in any promotional materials, and will re-evaluate product conformance to the level standard as required. In addition to this surveillance, BIFMA may also conduct periodic Web and marketplace reviews of mark usage. If violations are discovered, BIFMA will contact the certifying body and/or the infringing organization, per the level mark and logo monitoring strategies described in Section V.

D. Probationary Use and Withdrawal of level® Certification Mark
The certifying body is responsible for determining when the level certification mark should be subject to probationary use or withdrawn due to product nonconformance or improper use. Mark probationary use can occur for a limited period of time as specified by the certifying body. The certifying body will provide the applicant organization of a probationary use level mark the conditions under which the probationary use status can be removed (e.g., corrective actions that shall be taken). At the end of the probationary period, the certifying body will investigate whether the indicated conditions for reinstating the level certification mark have been fulfilled. Upon receiving proof of fulfillment of these conditions, the certifying body will notify the applicant organization that probationary use has been removed.
V. level® Certification Mark Use Guidelines

A. level® Mark Requirements for Products
The level certification mark was created to differentiate products in the marketplace that meet the ANSI/BIFMA e3 standard for product sustainability and have been third party certified. Any product to which the certification mark is applied must be certified to conform to the level standard by an accredited certifying body in accordance with the level certification scheme. The conformance designation shall be stated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Product Related Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>32 to 44 total points;</td>
<td>at least 5 of which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>are product related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>45 to 62 total points;</td>
<td>at least 11 of which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>are product related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>63 to total maximum</td>
<td>at least 18 of which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>points;</td>
<td>are product related</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The applicant organization must have applied for and received approval from an accredited certification body to use the level mark. The mark may be used on product cartons and packaging or adhered directly to the product. The mark may be used in promotional literature published about the product by the applicant organization, as long as it is in direct correlation to the product, but it must not be used to signify level labeling of every product from the applicant organization. The level certification mark may never be used to imply direct endorsement of an applicant organization or product by BIFMA. The certification mark may never be used in connection with products that have not met the level criteria, nor for products for which the standard may not apply.

If the level certification mark is withdrawn for any reason, the applicant organization and its wholesalers, distributors, and retailers must immediately cease to use the mark in conjunction with that product, and the mark must be eliminated from product packaging/promotional materials within six months from the date of withdrawal notification. If BIFMA finds that the applicant organization or its wholesalers, distributors, and retailers are at any time using the mark incorrectly, those entities must immediately cease to use the mark in conjunction with that product, and the mark must be eliminated from product packaging/promotional materials within six months from the date of withdrawal notification.

B. level® Mark Probationary Use and Withdrawal from Products
The level certification mark will be subjected to probationary use or withdrawn from a product if it is found not to conform to the level standard and/or level® Certification Mark Use Guidelines. Specifically, probationary use of the level mark on a product will be determined by the certifying body for product nonconformance identified during ongoing surveillance, improper use of the level mark on products or promotional materials, or infringement of the certification requirements as described herein. Probationary use of the level certification mark will be rescinded once the areas of concern are corrected to the satisfaction of the certifying body. The level mark will be withdrawn from a product for more severe or repeated instances of product nonconformance or misuse of the level mark. Procedures describing level certification mark probationary use and withdrawal are described in further detail in Appendix A.

C. level® Mark Monitoring, Violations, Enforcement, and Discontinuation
Proper use of the level certification mark on products and product packaging will be monitored and enforced by BIFMA and/or the certifying bodies that certify these products.

In order to ensure the integrity of the level certification mark and as a service to assist applicant organizations, wholesalers, distributors, and retailers with proper use of the level certification mark, BIFMA encourages each participating organization to provide pre-press samples of any promotional materials or Internet files used to promote its level labeled product(s). BIFMA will provide prompt review (within five business days) of any pre-press materials provided for quick turnaround review prior to publishing.

Violations of the proper use of the level certification mark include, but are not limited to:

- Use of the mark in conjunction with products that are not certified to the level standard.
- Use of the mark on promotional materials that falsely imply every product on that page/within that section/in that promotional piece meets the level criteria.
- Use of some portion of the level certification mark, but not the mark in its entirety.

BIFMA reserves the right to collect samples of level marks including the mark used on promotional materials. For any of the above violations that come to BIFMA’s attention, BIFMA will notify the certifying body that authorized the use of the level mark for the product in question. The certifying body will then engage in investigation and resolution of the complaint in accordance with ISO/IEC 17065 and the certifying body’s policies and procedures. If no certifying body is associated with the logo or mark used, BIFMA will follow up with the violating organization directly. BIFMA will endeavor to resolve violation cases informally, however, if the violation is not corrected within 90 days, BIFMA may resort to formal legal action. Applicant organizations may not, under any circumstances, continue to use the level certification mark in conjunction with products for which the level mark has been withdrawn.