



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FAQ



**PLASTIC FREE CERTIFICATION
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
PFS-S-6**



plastic**free**certification
benefit company
innovative startup

**Frequently Asked Questions
FAQ
on the Plastic Free Certification -
Management System
Certification process**

2024

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The Plastic Free Certification - Management System

Who is the Plastic Free - Management System certification accessible to?

This Scheme is designed to be accessible to any organization or company that wishes to embark on a journey to reduce single-use plastics. All that is needed is to demonstrate the reduction of a plastic item and proper waste management to access the certification, valorize one's commitment, the reduced CO₂, and obtain guidance, advice and accompaniment to increasingly minimize the use of single-use plastics.

Plastic Free - Management System certification, in fact, applies to organizations of all types and sizes, both public and private, with the exception of those involved in the production and processing of conventional plastic single-use items and those who manage plastic waste for purposes other than recycling. Sectors such as food, catering, hotel and tourism are those with the greatest opportunities for application of the reduction pathway, but any business can make a valuable contribution.

What are its benefits?

Obtaining Plastic Free certification gives organizations the opportunity to demonstrate a concrete commitment to reducing single-use plastics, improving their environmental performance in addition to corporate visibility and credibility. The certification scheme provides a baseline model and mechanism to effectively quantify and communicate efforts to reduce environmental impact, both in terms of kg of plastic and CO₂ equivalent.

Specifically, accessing the certification process grants access to a comprehensive guide that provides a clear and structured framework for implementing sustainable practices. The online platform for process management and monitoring simplifies management. The archive of Good Practices allows organizations to share and learn from the experiences of others.

In addition, our Plastic Free consultants offer additional consulting services, for finding customized solutions, periodic and ongoing accompaniment to certification processes, training for employees, and/or organizing surveillance audits.

The certification includes pre-certification promotional materials, including the Plastic Free "in Progress" logo, which can be used to communicate ongoing efforts, prior to obtaining the certificate. We provide promotional materials such as customized window stickers, logos and posters, contributing to the visibility of organizations committed to sustainability. Official digital and paper algacarta certificates attest to success in achieving single-use plastics reduction targets and offer tangible recognition including CO₂ equivalent savings.

In summary, Plastic Free - Management System certification offers a comprehensive package of support, recognition and promotion for organizations committed to reducing single-use plastics.

What are the requirements for obtaining the Plastic Free - Management System certification?






Before starting the certification process, the organization must ensure that prerequisites are met, such as the availability of a physical location to implement the process, identification of a Plastic Free process manager, availability of adequate operational and economic resources, willingness to evaluate alternatives to single-use plastics, compliance with relevant legislation, and a commitment to inform staff, customers and suppliers about adherence to the Plastic Free process.

To obtain the certificate, it is sufficient to demonstrate the reduction of a plastic item and proper waste management. However, the certification scheme stimulates a process of continuous and progressive improvement and recognizes five levels of progress (grades) that are awarded depending on the level of Plastic Free commitment along the supply chain. The more involved suppliers are in the plastics reduction process, the higher the grade recognized.

How does the grades evaluation system work?

We realize that it is through small progress that significant impacts are generated, so the certification scheme recognizes companies various grades to testify to their level of commitment.

To achieve Plastic Free certification, companies must remove single-use plastics along their supply chain. The greater the involvement of suppliers, the higher the grade awarded.

REQUIREMENTS					
	Grade E	Grade D	Grade C	Grade B	Grade A
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusion in the PA of at least 80 per cent of the conventional single-use plastics used in the spaces covered by the certification; - Reduction of at least 1 single-use plastic; 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proper monitoring and valorization of reductions; - Appropriate Plastic Free training and communication carried out; - Waste and plastic management in accordance with local regulations; 		✓	✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction of each single-use plastic purchased from mass distribution; - Reduction of at least 1 single-use plastic purchased from suppliers; 			✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elimination of every single-use plastic purchased from mass distribution; - Reduction of every single-use plastic purchased from suppliers; 				✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elimination of all single-use plastics throughout the supply chain; - Absence of unresolved major non-conformities; 					✓
Good practices and non-conformities with the Standard can increase or decrease the final grade.					

What is the certification based on?

The Plastic Free - Management System certification is based on what is defined in the Plastic Free Standard - Management System, defined by text economy PFS-S. It is a Standard managed by Eco Sphere Academy APS

(ESA), internationally protected and periodically updated on the basis of the indications suggested by the Plastic Free Quality Board (ESA's internal body, guarantor of the reliability of the certification systems).

The PFS-S describes in detail the management model for reducing single-use plastics and the criteria for certification. The first version of the PFS-S was drafted during 2019 and currently its sixth issue, published on 31/05/2024, is in force.

By whom and how is the Plastic Free Certificate issued?

The Plastic Free Management System Certificate can only be issued by Certification Bodies accredited by the trademark owner (ESA) and Plastic Free Certification Srl is one of them.

The Evaluation Body of Plastic Free Certification Srl is composed of environmental activists, university professors, editors, and experts in the Plastic Free Standard.

The Certification Committee is required to meet within 30 days from the date of the audit. During the meeting, the documentation collected by the auditor is analyzed, and the requirements for issuing the Certificate are evaluated. The Certification Committee decides by an absolute majority and approves a meeting report containing the outcome of the evaluation. In case of a positive outcome, the Committee defines the applicable grade in accordance with the Standard.

Based on objective evidence and useful information obtained during the verification phase by the auditor, the Certification Body expresses an unchallengeable and irrevocable judgment.



What information is contained in a valid Plastic Free certificate?

Plastic Free certificates - Management System, in order to be officially valid, must contain the following elements: Certificate Title: "Plastic Free Management System Certificate" with Registration Number; Organization Name and address of the certified structure(s); Reference Standard "Plastic Free Standard - Management System: PFS-S-6" and its associated "Eco Sphere Academy" logo; Grade obtained and its corresponding logo; Date of Issue and Expiry; Indication of the certificate type: "Initial certification" or "Renewal" and start date of the certification period: in cases of continuous renewal, the issuance date of the first Certificate will be provided; Name, Logo, and signature of the Certifying Body.

How long is the Plastic Free certificate valid for?

The first Certificate is valid for 365 calendar days from the date of the Certification Committee report.

There is no concept of automatic renewal of certification. Once the annual single-use plastic reduction process has been completed, the Organization must apply for renewal in order to continue the Plastic Free process.

In cases where the first stage renewal audit is carried out before the expiry date of the previous certificate, we have a renewal in continuity and the new certificate will be valid for 365 calendar days from the expiry date of the previous certificate.

In the event that the Organization carries out the first stage audit after the expiry date of the certificate, or in the event that the renewal audit is not requested by the deadline, it is possible to request a “discontinuous” certification renewal. In this case, the organization will be rehabilitated in the process and the new certificate will be valid for 365 calendar days from the date of its issue.

How can the impact in terms of CO₂eq be calculated?

During 2021, Plastic Free Certification SBrl conducted research work in collaboration with the Department of Industrial Engineering and Economics at the University of L'Aquila on the Carbon Footprint assessment of single-use plastic elimination.

The research team, coordinated by Dr. Davide Di Battista, looked at the Plastic Free Certification methodology with the aim of valuing the carbon dioxide equivalent emissions avoided through actions to reduce, eliminate or replace single-use plastic items. The procedure developed started from a careful and voluminous literature search of scientific articles, international reports and publications on LCA (Life Cycle Assessment) analysis and carbon footprint of single-use plastic items. This research made it possible to obtain the values of CO₂ equivalent emitted during the life cycle (from when the raw materials to make it are extracted from the ground, to end-of-life management, passing through all stages of production, assembly, transportation, distribution, use, and disposal) of specific plastic products or product categories. Thus, the research made it possible to create summary matrices, where for each product category and material, a value of kgCO₂eq/kg plastic was identified.

Subsequently, the research focused on substitution hypotheses. Hence, the literature analysis on product categories was also repeated by considering biodegradable plastic materials (PLA, PHA, bio-PET, bio-PE, etc.), as well as paper, tetrapak, kraftpaper, and wood, and items made of multipurpose materials (glass, aluminum).

An algorithm embedded in the monitoring platform automatically relates the values of these matrices to the periodic data of the organizations, returning the exact figure on the impact of each organization's reduction actions, net of any more sustainable substitutions, and know how many kg of CO₂ equivalents are saved by applying the Plastic Free Certification procedure.



The certification process

How can I undertake certification?

Contact info@plasticfreecertification.org. A qualified consultant will get back to you to start your Plastic Free journey.

Who are the Plastic Free consultants?

Plastic Free consultants are professionals, internal to PFC Sbrl, related to other consulting agencies or freelancers, who have received specific training on the Plastic Free Standard - Management System and have developed the necessary know-how to accompany organizations in the process of reducing plastics. With their invaluable support, companies can identify the most suitable solutions for their cases and be followed step by step through each certification process, right up to audit verification.

There are currently 21 Plastic Free enabled consultants operating in various parts of the world.

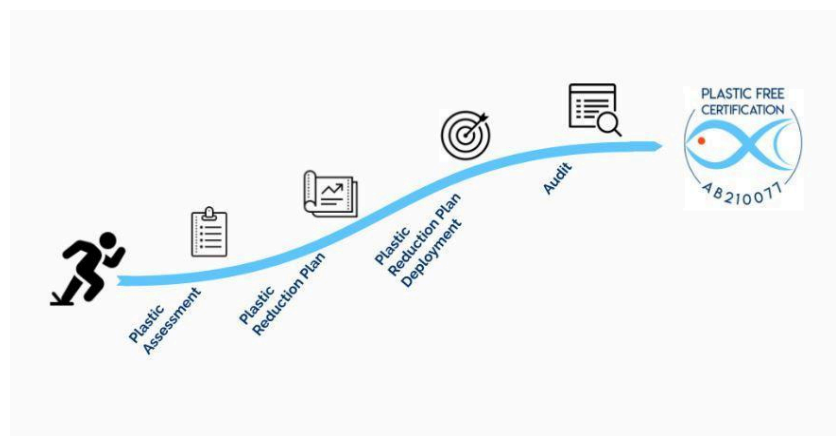
What are the stages of the Certification Process?

The certification process consists of several stages:

1. **Initial Analysis** (Plastic Assessment - PA): Assessment of the use of single-use plastics at the initial stage of the process. It consists of an analysis of production processes and the creation of a comprehensive list of items aimed at gaining awareness of one's environmental impact of plastics.
2. **Planning** (Plastic Reduction Plan - PRP): Development of a Plastic Reduction Plan to identify concrete reduction actions. For each item, with the support of a consultant, opportunities for reduction/elimination/replacement are assessed and actions to be implemented over a one-year period are determined.
3. **Implementation and Monitoring** (Plastic Reduction Plan Deployment - PRPD): Implementation of planned measures and periodic recording of progress and results achieved. In addition, this phase includes dedicated staff training and the development of Plastic Free communication to stakeholders.
4. **Verification Audit**: Verification of compliance with the Plastic Free Standard - Management System, conducted by independent auditors in online or in-person mode. The organization can request the verification audit within a maximum of 10 months after initiation.

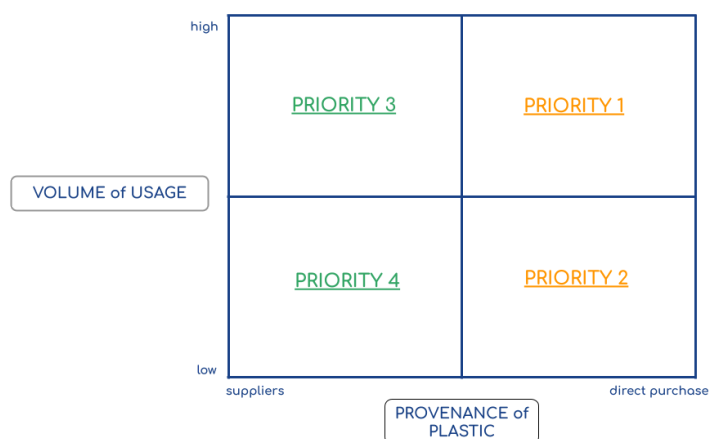
These steps are managed and monitored on the **telematic platform** provided by Plastic Free Certification Sbrl, which facilitates the management of data and documentation and makes it possible to calculate the reduction in CO2 equivalent emissions triggered by the certification process.

Within 30 days after the audit, PFC's Certification Committee, the only authorized body, determines the grade and issues the **Plastic Free Certificate**.



How to identify plastics to be reduced as a priority?

Once we become aware of the amount and type of single-use plastics we use, through the Plastic Assessment, we can begin to develop a reduction plan. But where to start? To identify which plastics to start reducing, it is essential to follow a consistent and responsible approach. Initially, the focus is on reducing plastics that an



organization can eliminate on its own, without the involvement of third parties, and remove what are referred to as direct purchases

In fact, the Standard prioritizes items and packaging purchased from medium/large retailers, such as supermarkets, wholesalers and stores. Once we eliminate plastics whose sourcing is our sole responsibility, efforts to engage third-party suppliers and partners in the fight against plastics become more credible and effective.

In addition, it is important to prioritize items purchased in larger quantities over those with smaller volumes.

What kind of reduction action to apply? Which alternatives should be preferred?

There are multiple alternatives to plastics. However, not all solutions have the same environmental impact, which can vary significantly depending on the substitute material and its lifespan. Below are the types of solutions allowed by the Plastic Free Standard and the order of their prioritization. Only in cases where, for reasonable reasons, the previous priority cannot be pursued, can the next priority be opted for;

- Priority 1 - Elimination of the item from the production and/or supply chain;
- Priority 2 - Replacement with a durable item or returnable glass;
- Priority 3 - Reuse of the item multiple times or replacement with disposable highly recyclable materials such as aluminum, paper, cardboard;
- Priority 4 - Replacement with COMPOST HOME certified disposable article;
- Priority 5 - Replacement with disposable article certified UNI EN 13432 (COMPOSTABLE);
- Priority 6 - Recycling the item for other purposes or materials whose recycling implies a considerable environmental impact, such as tetra pack or disposable glass;

How to find the right Plastic Free solutions and suppliers for your specific case?

To identify the Plastic Free solutions suitable for your specific case, we suggest you start by exploring the Archive available on our platform. This tool is organized both by target sector (kitchen, hotellerie, events, industry, office, agricultural) and by prioritization of reduction actions (as previously described). This categorization allows you to quickly identify solutions relevant to your context.

The **Plastic Free Solutions Archive** gives you the opportunity to discover that there are concrete solutions to reduce the use of single-use plastics. If a specific solution involves substitution with other items, you can then begin to search for suppliers and alternatives available in your local area. We recognize that the search for Plastic Free solutions and suppliers may be complex for various reasons. This is why we offer the optional additional service called "**Custom Search for Plastic Free Solutions**" through which our consultants conduct detailed searches to identify available solutions best suited to the specific needs of organizations.

How to train employees? How many and which ones? How to demonstrate the training I have done?

Employee training is a crucial element in the success of the Plastic Free certification process. Internal staff must be aware of the single-use plastics reduction actions taken by the organization, and in order to ensure a proper Plastic Free path, they must be able to learn about the Standard, recognize the types of materials, and detect situations of compliance and noncompliance.

The organization has several options available to train staff effectively. The organization can schedule in-house training and/or refresher meetings; organize a Plastic Free training course delivered by the relevant consultant; provide staff with training materials and ensure that they conduct self-directed training; involve staff in Plastic Free process side-by-side communications with the consultant; ensure non-formal knowledge transfer; etc.

The staff to be involved in training includes those who handle single-use fossil plastic products at any level in the business processes subject to certification and those who are in contact with the organization's stakeholders. This includes several categories of employees: those with managerial and decision-making responsibilities that influence business decisions, such as executive directors, sustainability managers, purchasing managers, etc.; Operational employees directly involved in the management of single-use plastics, such as kitchen workers, packaging area, hygiene and cleaning area, as well as waste managers; Employees who interact with the stakeholders involved, such as those responsible for loading/unloading goods, warehouse managers, and all those who come into contact with both suppliers and end customers.

In order to demonstrate that training has actually been conducted, the organization must provide objective evidence. This evidence may include the statement of training, a template for which is available in the online platform, possibly accompanied by minutes of training meetings, email communications, training materials used, photos and videos of training sessions, and more.

How can I develop my Plastic Free communication?

The Plastic Free Standard requires a communication focused on spreading the Plastic Free commitment, to customers and to the relevant socio-economic context. This process of raising awareness and conviction is essential to generate significant impact.

Communication can begin from the very earliest stages of the journey: the "Plastic Free Certification- IN PROGRESS" logo is made available to the organization from the outset so that it can communicate its choice, through both verbal and written means, online and offline. In addition, it is crucial that the Plastic Assessment (PA) and Plastic Reduction Plan (PRP) are made public at least internally in the company staff to demonstrate the organization's transparency and commitment.

All communication methods implemented are reviewed during the audit.

Once certification is achieved, the organization receives the certificate in algacarta to be framed and posted, indicating the grade achieved and the overall reductions in kg of plastic and CO₂eq. Then the official PLASTIC FREE CERTIFICATION label can be used in any relevant informational context. In addition, we provide both a customized poster, highlighting the actions implemented and the results achieved, and adhesive decals.

Finally, the organization is required to complete the publication of the Monitoring File (MF), also making the monitoring of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) accessible, in preparation for the renewal audit. These tools enable organizations to clearly communicate their commitment to reducing single-use plastics, tangibly demonstrating their contribution to the environment and sustainability. Active collaboration in promoting the Plastic Free commitment will help create a lasting impact in the fight against plastic pollution.

How can I report plastics reductions that I have already implemented in the past?

The certification scheme testifies that an organization is committed to a plastics reduction pathway. It follows that the Monitoring File refers to the reduction actions that the organization implements in the current year.

To report plastics reductions that have already been implemented and completed in the past, prior to the initiation of the certification process, it is possible to supplement the Monitoring File with the reporting of good practices for evaluation. In the appropriate "Good Practices" section, the organization can provide information relevant to these past reduction actions.

In addition, other environmental sustainability actions, not strictly related to the use of single-use fossil plastics, can also be reported. In both cases, you must provide details on the description of the action and present objective evidence of their implementation.

The organization is not obliged to propose good practices. The Certification Committee will review the reported initiatives and, if deemed appropriate, relevant and valuable, they will be considered in the overall evaluation of the organization.

Good practices can be made public and collected in a dedicated repository made available to organizations undergoing certification. This approach makes it possible to enhance the efforts of organizations and inspire others on the path toward reducing single-use plastics.

How long is the process to obtain certification?

The process to obtain Plastic Free - Management System certification has a time flexibility that adapts to the specific needs of each organization. The duration varies from a minimum of 2 months to a maximum of 10 months, but it is important to note that the timing depends on the organization itself.

Once the certification process has begun, the organization can take the time necessary to conduct the Plastic Assessment, develop the reduction plan, and begin its implementation. The follow-up audit cannot be requested without the completion of the Monitoring File, which must at least monitor the initiation of reduction action. Within a maximum limit of 10 months after initiation, the organization must request the verification audit.

Consequently, the length of the process depends on the organization's strategic choices. Some may opt for a quicker approach to achieve certification in a short period of time, enhancing what has already been achieved, while others may prefer a more ambitious approach, taking the time to implement a more complex reduction plan, aspire to the highest possible grade, and request the audit close to the 9-month maximum time limit.

How might I best prepare for the audit? What documentation shall I prepare?

1. Make sure you have considered every single-use item of fossil origin used at the beginning of the certification process within the Plastic Assessment;
2. Make sure you have reported the weight of the items net of their contents;
3. Ensure that you have met the stated deadlines of the reduction actions;
4. Ensure that you have completed periodic KPI monitoring;
5. Ensure that you have provided comprehensive information with respect to plastic waste management;
6. Ensure you have reported past plastic reductions and virtuous environmental sustainability actions in the Good Practices section;
7. Prepare demonstrations referring to Plastic Reduction Plan actions (purchase invoices, data sheets of compostable alternatives, photos, etc.);
8. Prepare demonstrations of Plastic Free training delivered to staff (photos, emails, self-declaration, training materials, etc.);
9. Prepare demonstrations of Plastic Free communication carried out to customers, suppliers, etc. (screenshots of social media communications, flyers and posters, emails or text messages, etc.);
10. Gather any additional evidence such as corporate presentation, sustainability report, organizational chart, etc.

In the event that a remote audit is requested, the organization agrees to provide, no later than one week before the agreed upon date, the above documentation accompanied by:

11. Floor plan of the spaces subject to certification;
12. Video showing the spaces subject to certification, the plastic free solutions implemented and the management of plastic waste;
13. Any other evidence as may be specified and requested by the auditor.

What can be done to strive for the highest grade?

To aspire to the highest grade of certification, Grade A, the organization must adopt a holistic and pervasive strategy. First, it is essential to involve the entire supply chain, ensuring that each link in this chain is fully aware of and aligned with the goal of eliminating single-use plastic. The organization must demonstrate that it has effectively eliminated as much single-use plastic as possible throughout the supply chain. In addition, it is required that monitoring and valuation processes are adequate, transparent and comprehensive. It is also essential that the relevant waste management regulations are properly complied with, and that staff training and "Plastic Free" communication, have been conducted appropriately, ensuring that every part that makes up the organization and orbits around it understands and adheres to the importance of this commitment.

That said, it should be considered that the presence of good practices and, conversely, non-conformities with the Standard, can influence, either upward or downward, the final grade awarded.

What are non-conformities?

Non-conformities refer to deviations from what is specified in the PFS-S and can be categorized as major or minor. Major non-conformities affect the management system's ability to achieve the expected results and, if identified during the audit, require prompt and effective corrective action. Major non-conformity situations include:

- Items in use by the Organization not reported in the Plastic Assessment;
- Incorrect indication of the type of supply;
- Items included in the PA for which reduction is declared impossible with non-exhaustive or implausible justifications;
- Absence of planned reduction actions in the PRP, unless the Organization has already exhausted all improvement opportunities;
- Inappropriate significance analysis and failure to respect the hierarchy of priorities;
- No reduction action initiated in the PRPD;
- Periodic values indicated in the KPI list inconsistent with the statements and evidence collected;
- Failure to meet deadlines for reduction actions of the current PRP and, if applicable, the previous one;
- Plastic waste management not compliant with the reference regulations;
- Unprepared personnel on Plastic Free issues;
- Failure to communicate on the current PA and PRP;
- Violation of brand usage rules defined in the document "Regulation for the use of the Plastic Free Certification mark".

Minor non-conformities, on the other hand, do not affect the management system's ability to achieve the expected results, but their resolution contributes to the continuous improvement of the system.

How to request the verification audit?

Once the monitoring file is completed, the organization requests the verification audit via the appropriate button in the dashboard of the Plastic Free platform. The request will be successful only if all the necessary information has been properly entered into the monitoring file.

The request must be made:

- in case of first certification within a maximum of 10 months after the application;
- in case of renewal within 1 months of the expiration of the previous certificate.

At this point you will be put in touch with a qualified auditor to arrange the date(s) in agreement with the parties.

What happens during a verification audit?

The verification audit is divided into first-phase and second-phase audits. The first-phase audit is structured as follows:

1. Operational verification: the auditor verifies the compliance of internal production processes within the client's premises, the presence of conventional single-use plastics, the preparation of personnel with respect to plastic-free issues, and any other relevant aspects.
2. Documentary verification: the auditor verifies the compliance of the Monitoring File and its attachments, documentation of training and communication processes.
3. The auditor presents the first -phase audit report (in the case of multiple auditors, it is done collectively), including a list of major and minor non-conformities, which is shared with the Organization so that they can define a relative management plan and schedule corrective actions.

During the first-phase audit, the date for the second-phase audit is established, to be conducted within a maximum of three months from the conclusion of the first-phase audit:

4. Verification of corrective actions: the auditor further analyzes the processes, evaluates the effectiveness of corrective actions implemented in response to identified non-conformities, and gathers relevant evidence.
5. Proposal of Good Practices: the auditor gathers information regarding the potential presence of Good Practices that the client intends to submit for publication on the PFC website/platform.
6. Signing the report: based on the gathered information, the auditor compiles the second-phase audit report, which will be signed by both parties.

What are corrective actions?

Corrective actions are measures taken to address and resolve the non-conformities identified during the first-phase audit. They must be immediate, appropriate, and effective in correcting the underlying causes of the non-conformities and preventing their recurrence.

During the closing meeting of the first-phase audit, the auditor presents the identified non-conformity situations to the client for inclusion in the appropriate register, which includes scheduled corrective actions, resolution dates, responsible parties, and any changes or improvements made, along with the collected objective evidence. The corrective action register allows for thorough verification during the second-phase audit and ensures that such actions are managed effectively.

In the event of a dispute regarding the identification of a non-conformity, the Organization may present counterarguments during the second-phase audit, which must be faithfully recorded in the audit documentation for evaluation by the Evaluation Body.

What steps to take to renew the Certification?

1. In the aftermath of receiving your certificate, you can duplicate the Monitoring File in the platform to continue tracking your Plastic Free path in the new year. This new document will be subject of the renewal audit;
2. No later than 1 month before the previous certificate expires, a request must be made to the Plastic Free consultant for the continuity renewal procedure and submit the relevant application;
3. Revise the Plastic Assessment (add any new plastics/packaging in use, delete items already removed at the date of issuance of the previous certificate);
4. Ensure that actions planned last year (and available in the old monitoring file) have been completed on time.
5. Identify new reduction actions. To continue on the Plastic Free path, at least one new reduction action must be planned, unless all possible reduction actions have already been taken.
6. Monitor progress in the KPI List section;
7. Collect evidence of reduction actions (any compostability certificates, communications with suppliers, purchase invoices, etc.).
8. Ensure that staff have been trained on the Plastic Free pathway. If employees have not changed since last year, they do not need to be re-trained; Ensure that Plastic Free-oriented communication has taken place and collect evidence of this;
9. Request the verification audit, which must be conducted within 2 months after the expiration of the old certificate.

10. The new certificate will be issued within 30 days from the date of the audit. If the audit is conducted before the expiration of the first certificate, it will be valid for 1 year after its issuance. If, on the other hand, it is carried out later, the new certificate will be valid for 1 year from the expiration of the previous certificate.



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