

level[®] Certification Program Guidelines

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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:

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 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.