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## Revised FSC Chain of Custody standards with basic workers' rights protections

1 message

FSC US Policy and Standards Forum &lt;standardsforum@us.fsc.org&gt;

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Policy and Standards Forum  
Forest Stewardship Council— US



Dear FSC US Policy and Standards Forum,

Last week, FSC International published its revised Chain of Custody standard (FSC-STD-40-004 V3-1) and a revised Chain of Custody Evaluations standard (FSC-STD-20-011 V4-2), both of which were approved by the FSC International Board of Directors in January. Most prominent in these revisions is the integration of basic workers' rights protections into the FSC Chain of Custody system, which was first requested by FSC's membership at the FSC General Assembly in 2008. In March 2014, the FSC International Board asked the FSC Secretariat to develop an FSC system-wide solution for certificate holders' compliance with fundamental workers' rights, as expressed in the ILO Core Conventions and defined in the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Among the more challenging issues in developing this solution has been how to do so in an environment of diverse national and local regulatory regimes and also with respect to countries like the United States, which hasn't ratified all of the ILO Core Conventions. Following an initial member-based working group process that included labor union and employer representatives, in August 2017, the FSC Board approved a report with the working group's recommended generic criteria and indicators for protection of workers' rights, and requested their incorporation into the FSC Chain of Custody (CoC) standards. Following this, a new six-person technical working group, including two US nationals, was formed to develop and implement an incorporation strategy. Their work progressed through two public consultations in 2020 and a final set of recommendations, which led to the FSC International Board's decision in January to move to publish the two revised standards.

### **FSC-STD-40-004 V3-1 Chain of Custody Certification now includes:**

1. Abolition of child labour, elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation, respect of freedom of association, and effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
2. Adopting and implementing policy statement(s) that encompass the FSC Core Labor Requirements;

3. The potential to demonstrate compliance through certification with other social certifications;
4. An option for other organizations such as certification bodies to submit certification schemes which comply to the FSC Core Labour Requirements, and;
5. Incorporating a risk-based approach via self-assessments in which organizations describe how they apply the requirements to their operations.

The revised **FSC-STD-20-011 V4-2 Chain of Custody Evaluations** provides direction to auditors for how to evaluate the new components of the Chain of Custody Standard.

The new version of the Chain of Custody Standard will become effective on **May 2, 2021**. Certificate holders will then have 12 months to transition to the revised Standard, which means before or by **May 1, 2022**. During this transition period, all certificate holders will be evaluated against the revised version of the Standard. FSC International is developing various training tools to assist both certificate holders and their certifying bodies during the transition period. FSC US will work to ensure that these tools are relevant for the US context and if necessary augment with nationally-specific content.

Additional background and resources are available from the [FSC web page for the revision process](#), including:

- the 2017 FSC International Board approved report, “FSC Report On Generic Criteria And Indicators Based On ILO Core Conventions Principles”, and
- a crosswalk between the current and revised versions of the Chain of Custody standards, “Version Comparison\_ILO\_Current-Vs-Revised”

The revised Chain-of-Custody standard is designed to protect the basic rights of workers. This will help level the playing field between US companies and those in other countries where labor laws are not as rigorous, or they are not enforced.

FSC US expects certificate holders in the US to meet the new requirements under existing policies and practices by meeting all relevant national, state and local laws and regulations, albeit with a need to demonstrate conformance as part of an FSC audit.

FSC US will continue to support certificate holders through the transition to the revised Chain of Custody standard. We will be following up with further communications and guidance in the days and weeks ahead.

Thanks,  
FSC US Policy & Standards Staff

Forest Stewardship Council U.S. (FSC-US)

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