

Complaints and Appeals

1. General

Holzforschung Austria tries hard to carry out all its services correctly and in compliance with the applicable regulations at a high level. Of course, not everything runs so plain and smoothly always, and we also make mistakes from time to time.

Sometimes it also happens that you disagree with the results of the services you have commissioned - such as tests, inspections or certifications - or you doubt the conformity of our customers' products that we have declared.

If you are not satisfied with us or one of our services, which we have provided either for you or for someone else, we offer you the opportunity to raise your concerns. In this document we inform you how we will deal with your complaint or appeal in accordance with a regulated procedure and how you will be informed about the progress of this procedure.

2. Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
appeal	Dissatisfaction of a customer with the decision regarding the conformity assessment (testing, inspection, certification, verification) <i>(There is a contractual relationship in this context.)</i>
complaint	Any other expression of dissatisfaction with the activities of the HFA by customers, customers from customers, accreditation bodies, authorities, etc. <i>(There may or may not be a contractual relationship in this connection.)</i>
Conformity assessment	Demonstration that specified requirements relating to a product or process have been met
AK-Zertifizierung	Arbeitskreis Zertifizierung (<i>Working Group Certification</i>) is an independent body of <i>Holzforschung Austria - Austrian Society for Wood Research</i> , which is available to the HFA for various tasks in the area of certification. Among other things, as a higher authority in complaints and objections to certifications.

3. General provisions

- HFA is committed to the fact that investigating and deciding on appeals must not lead to discriminatory acts.
- HFA undertakes to resolve complaints and appeals in a timely manner.
- If you are one of our customers, we always correspond with you also in the case of an appeal or a complaint in the language in which the reports and other correspondence between you and HFA are kept.

If you are not one of our customers in this context, the language of correspondence will be German or English.

In both cases we can agree on a language of correspondence alternatively.

- We ask for your understanding that only complaints and appeals can be dealt with in writing. This gives you the opportunity to present your request formally and in detail in order to enable further treatment.
- Provide names and contact details, otherwise the case cannot and will not be dealt with further.
- Describe the specific case precisely and clearly.
Include objective evidence of the different aspects that support your complaint or appeal. Vague and baseless allegations and rumours will not be investigated.
- If your complaint or appeal does not relate to an activity of the HFA, we cannot deal with it.
- HFA decisions are only made by people who are not or were not involved in the specific event.
- We treat all information with absolute confidentiality. This does not apply to information that we have to pass on due to legal or other binding provisions. For example, these could be information provisions which are required by either private Certification Program Owners like FSC®, PEFC™ or ENplus® or by accreditation bodies and notifying or other authorities.
- Information regarding customers who come from sources other than the customer himself (e.g. complainants, authorities) will also be treated confidentially.
- The complainant's anonymity vis-à-vis our customer is maintained unless he can demonstrably waive this.
- If the HFA is required by law or authorized by contractual agreements to disclose confidential information, the customer or person concerned, unless prohibited by law, will be informed of the information provided.
- Anonymous complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction that are not justified will not be dealt with any further. However, they are treated like comments from interest groups and will be dealt during the next surveillance audit with the relevant customer.

4. Procedure

- As soon as we receive the complaint or objection that you have submitted in writing, we will confirm receipt by email and describe the further procedure.
- If information to handle the complaint or the appeal is still missing, we will also inform you in this email and ask you to submit it later.
- If your complaint or objection does not relate to an activity of HFA, we will inform you in this email as well and about the termination of the procedure.
- If all necessary information is available, we will try to clarify the matter and, if necessary, carry out a cause analysis.
- Based on this, actions are determined and decisions on solutions are made.
- You will be informed about these actions and proposed solutions at the latest 2 weeks after receipt of your appeal or complaint.
- If you agree, they will be implemented, and you will be informed about the completion of the process by email.
- If you do not agree, your request will be dealt with by higher authorities. If it is a certification activity, this is AK-Certification, in all other cases the head of the institute.
- You will then be informed about the decisions of these instances by email. By then, it will have been less than 3 months since you received your complaint or appeal.
- If you agree to these decisions, the measures will be implemented, and you will be informed of the completion of the procedure by email.
- If you do not agree with these, you have the right to take legal action.
- In the case of HFA activities in connection with the FSC® certification program, there is also the option of contacting the ASI-Assurance Services International body that accredits us for these agendas and, subsequently, FSC®. In these cases, too, you will be informed by email about the completion of the procedure at HFA.
- In the case of HFA activities in connection with the ENplus® certification program, there is also the option of contacting the ENplus® Management. In these cases, too, you will be informed by email about the completion of the procedure at HFA.