



Group Chain of Custody

FSC recognises that there is a real need to help small businesses who cannot afford certification. While it is not possible or desirable for FSC to fund certification, the FSC system must cater for small forest owners and small processors, manufacturers, merchants, wholesalers and printers.

A number of small businesses needing chain of custody certification can come together in a group and apply for one certificate. Like Group Certification for Woodlands, Chain of Custody (CoC) Group Certification requires certifiers to audit a random sample of members of a group and carry out risk assessment of the group scheme as a whole, rather than assessing each individual business. As a consequence, the overall cost of certification should be reduced. However, one drawback of group chain of custody is if that one member of the group fails an audit then the entire groups certificate can be withdrawn. By reducing the certifier's sampling rates the individual cost of certification to each member of the group can be reduced. A group co-ordinator will need to be assigned to ensure that all members of the Group are using systems that meet the FSC rules.

Group certification can further benefit from less frequent audits if the Group co-ordinator carries out more intensive monitoring of their own.

Group CoC is particularly designed for groups of small enterprises that already have a legal organisation or the support of an external support organisation, e.g. trade associations and co-operatives.

Groups can only contain businesses that are either:

- under 15 employees
- under 25 employees and a turnover of under \$1 million (around £700,000).

FSC is continuing to work on eligibility criteria that are appropriate in a global context and may make changes to the policy based on the results.

There are full guidelines available that can be used by potential applicants to help design their group scheme. Further explanatory documents and the full guidelines are available from the FSC UK Advisory Service.

You should also contact the FSC UK Advisory Service for details of existing group chain of custody schemes in the UK (see *FSCUK-FS-206 UK-based Group Schemes*).

FSC UK Advisory Service

Our Advisory Service is able to answer all queries related to the FSC system, including FSC certificate verification and basic product searches. We also have a Subscription Service for organisations needing more support and we offer a range of training and consultancy options.

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