

Information Sheet No. 3-2

Quality Assurance Systems

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What is quality assurance?

Quality assurance refers to a systematic pattern of all actions necessary to provide adequate confidence that the product optimally fulfils customers' expectations.

The risk to customers of purchasing inconsistent product, or a product not fit for purpose, or out of specification will vary depending on the type of quality system in place.

Types of quality assurance systems

In order to reduce the risk of purchasing a non-conforming or low quality product, the customer may require various levels of assessment of the supplier's *Quality Management System (QMS)*.

Additional indicators of quality may be provided to a customer by reporting that your product exceeds the minimum requirements for an industry or Australian Standard.

There are four Australian Standards for products containing recycled organics, and these are listed below. These standards are reviewed in Information Sheet Nos. 3-7 to 3-10.

- AS/NZS 4422 (1996). Playground surfacing – specifications, requirements and test method;
- AS 4454 (2002). Composts, soil conditioners and mulches;
- AS 3743 (2002). Potting mixes; and
- AS 4419 (2002). Soils for landscaping and garden use.

Four commonly used methods of assessment are described below from most risky to least risky from the customer's point of view (more★the better!).

Self declaration ★

This is a form of first party assessment.

The manufacturer says that they make products of a certain quality, possibly with reference to an Australian Standard, for example. This can be adequate for many low risk products, but it depends on the reputation, integrity and image of the company in the market.

This is the least desirable quality assurance system as product quality is not independently verified.

Customer-supplier assessment ★★

This is a form of second party assessment.

In this system, the customer audits the supplier's QMS with particular emphasis on the products the customer intends to buy. An excellent method if the customer has the resources and expertise to audit the supplier and the supplier is willing to subject their system and people to such audits.

In general, this is an effective method as suppliers can be subjected to multiple audits and have technical resources tied up in these audits. From a customer's point of view they can generally be very confident that products meet their requirements.

Quality system certification



This is a form of third party assessment.

Quality system certification — a process whereby a company's quality management system is assessed against international standards for quality — such as the AS/NZS ISO 9000:2000 series of documents — is an even better way of demonstrating the quality of a product.

As described in Information Sheet No. 3-1, QMSs comprise a variety of tools that assist an organisation in managing and controlling its processes, inputs and outputs to meet customer requirements (QAS, 2000).

This system ensures that the manufacturer has documented procedures in place to demonstrate capability to produce products to customer requirements, and to prevent unacceptable product being made at all stages of production.

A regularly audited and registered QMS is a customer's assurance that products sold will meet their requirements.

Please note that further details can be found in Information Sheet No. 3-1.

Product certification ★ ★ ★ ★

This is a form of third party assessment.

Although QMSs are a fundamental basis for consistently producing quality products, some customers may require additional evidence that a particular product conforms to a recognised national, international or industry product standard (e.g. AS 4454–2002 for Composts, Soil Conditioners and Mulches).

This is where a product certification system is required.

Product certification is the best way a customer can be assured that they are buying a product of consistent quality that conforms to a recognised standard for quality. Companies that wish to apply for product certification need to have a QMS in place.

The overall purpose of product certification is to ensure that the manufacturer can demonstrate that products can be consistently manufactured to a standard.

The company's capability to manufacture a product to a particular standard is assessed by 'type testing'. That is, a representative sample of product is independently selected and sent to an independent, recognised laboratory for testing.

To confirm that the manufacturer is able to demonstrate that products can be manufactured to a standard, regular auditing of the manufacturer's QMS relevant to the production of the product is also necessary.

Companies that have a QMS and manufacture products according to recognised standards can have their product marked with widely recognised Standards Australia 'five ticks' 'Certified Product' logo (Plate 1).

Plate 1. Certified Product logo demonstrating compliance to a recognised product standard.



Definitions

Quality Assurance

A planned and systematic pattern of all actions necessary to provide adequate confidence that the product optimally fulfils customers' expectations.

Quality Management System (QMS)

A set of procedures an organisation establishes to guarantee its products will satisfy consumers.

Applying for QMS and/or product certification

A good starting point for gaining information on applying for QMS certification and/or certification for a product to an Australian Standard is Quality Assurance Services Pty Ltd, contactable on the internet at <http://www.qas.com.au>

