

What is Chain of Custody, or CoC certification?

Chain of Custody (CoC) is the process of tracking certified wood fiber from the forest to the mill, from the merchant to the printer. It ensures the integrity of the supply chain, so specifiers can trust that the paper they print on came from responsibly managed forestlands.

Who needs to get CoC certified?

The chain of custody includes the entities that own the paper and materially change it before the identifying logo is printed on it. Typically, that includes paper mills, merchants, printers, and sometimes converters. It does not include print consumers, design agencies, transport companies, binderies, kitting or fulfillment houses.

Note: In some instances, binderies may need to get CoC certification since they are altering the product (the cover is usually made of paper/paperboard which alters what needs to be said on the label.) However, printers could enter into an outsourcing agreement with the bindery to cover this. Special situations, like these, should be addressed with an accredited third-party registrar.)

How long does it take for a printer to become certified?

Many factors impact the amount of time required for certification, including the number of facilities to be audited, and whether or not the printer has procedures in place that satisfy the requirements of the standards. A timeline for certification is outlined in the Printer Certification Getting Started PDF.

Who audits printers for CoC certification?

Neither FSC nor SFI conducts audits. These are performed via a third-party system and printers applying for certification deal directly with the auditor they select. Both SFI and FSC provide lists of accredited auditors on their websites, but we worked with Bureau Veritas Certification (BVC) to create a streamlined process for printers seeking dual certification to both standards. To review, go to the Printer Certification Getting Started PDF.

How much does it cost to get certified?

Bureau Veritas Certification, a third party registrar, provides printers with a comprehensive estimate upon completion of a Request for Quote. However, expenses break down as follows: \$1,250 per day for on-site audits; \$1,250 per day for report generation; travel fees and related expenses. Associated costs are outlined in the Printer Certification Getting Started PDF.

Is there a discount to printers seeking certification?

We do not fund or provide a discount to printers seeking CoC certification, and it receives no remuneration from Bureau Veritas Certification (BVC) for referring our customers to them.

Still, there can be financial benefit to using BVC, which is accredited to perform third-party audits to both the SFI and FSC standards. BVC can audit to both

standards simultaneously, so our printer customers can become dual certified while only incurring the expense and disruption of one audit (per location).

How long does the certification last and is there a lesser renewal fee?

CoC certified entities must renew their certifications annually. Many factors impact the cost of certification and printers should look to their auditor to provide an estimate of those expenses.

What are the auditors looking for when they come to my facility?

Printers must be able to accurately identify certified grades on inbound and outbound shipments and must print their own CoC certification number on their invoices. They must also segregate their certified from their non-certified inventory and must document and train their employees to their procedures. Finally, printers must be able to report their sales of certified product and retain their records for five years. For a complete listing of the requirements for CoC certification, review the Printer Certification Getting Started PDF.

Will the auditors be looking at how I handle other aspects of my business that impact the environment, like disposal of inks and solvents, or my recycling efforts?

No. CoC audits are about documenting the supply chain of SFI- and FSC-certified paper. Issues outside of paper ownership will not be scrutinized. The environmental claim being made is that the fiber in the paper was sourced from a forest that was responsibly managed to the standards of the certifying bodies. As handlers of the paper, merchants and printers are assuring consumers that they are getting the certified product that was specified.

Do I really have to get certified? Can't I just print the logos or the words FSC- and/or SFI-certified?

The trademarked FSC and SFI logos, or words identifying the piece as being printed on such papers, cannot be used unless that printer is CoC-certified. Without that certification, no claims can be printed about the content of the paper. That is true if the logo was supplied within a "print-ready" file. Even if the paper is certified and was purchased from a certified merchant, if a printer does not hold a CoC certificate and makes the claim, they have potentially subjected themselves to all the civil remedies available to trademark owners.

Does any agency track if the printers using the logos are actually certified?

SFI and FSC vigorously protect their trademarks. There are no label police, but there are watchdog organizations intent on exposing companies who "greenwash," or make environmental claims that are unsubstantiated by fact. They may pursue a course of action through the company who published the logo as well as the printer who printed it for their customer.

Can a non-certified paper merchant ship certified paper directly to a certified printer?

They can, but then it is no longer CoC-certified paper and no claims can be made.

Do you label your certified products?

Yes, SFI and FSC CoC labels are applied to certified products before being shipped to customers.

If paper is certified, what percentage of the pulp came from certified forests?

That is specific to the grade. SFI and FSC have different label systems, but on-product CoC labels indicate the claimed percentage of certified content in that product. For more information, go to fscus.org and sfiprogram.org.

Do you charge a premium for certified paper? No.

Is there a quality difference between certified and non-certified paper?

Certification does not speak to the quality of the paper, but assures consumers that it was sourced from well-managed forestlands.

How can I get SFI/FSC samples?

You can get samples of SFI- and FSC-certified grades from one of our division sample rooms. It is important to note, however, that paper samples are not CoC certified. To make a claim that a paper is certified, and/or print the SFI or FSC logo on it, the entire supply chain – or chain of custody – of that sheet must be validated. Even though we are a CoC-certified merchant, paper supplied by our sample rooms are not supplied for this purpose.

Where can I find a comprehensive list of FSC-certified papers?

Registered users to our ecommerce website can perform a keyword search for “FSC” to locate FSC-certified grades in the online paper catalog. Additionally, FSC-US maintains a list of FSC-certified grades on their website, as well as a list of FSC certified paper manufacturers and printers.

Where can I find a comprehensive list of SFI-certified papers?

Registered users to our ecommerce website can perform a keyword search for “SFI” to locate SFI-certified grades in the online paper catalog. All papers manufactured by SFI-certified participants, are CoC certified when sold by us. To view a comprehensive list of SFI-certified participants, go to SFIprogram.org.

Where can I go to learn more about CoC certification?

To learn more about the chain of custody, review the Printer Certification Getting Started PDF.