Every industry has a common goal, to satisfy customers and protect its reputation.

Product Certification

When shopping for products not purchased often, or ones that are considered to be specialty items, consumers are at risk of being trapped -- trapped into selecting inferior devices, systems that don't meet their specific needs, or products that are unnecessarily expensive.

Consumer fraud laws certainly offer some minimum protection. But, how can consumers feel confident that not only are they buying products to fit their demands, but that they also truly do what they say they are going to do?

In many American industries, including water treatment, the answer is simple, it is called "product certification."

Product certification can be loosely interpreted as a seal of approval. Often, an actual seal is placed on products to distinguish those that have met the various stringent requirements established. In most cases, certification is not simply passing a single test. In fact, when done right, product certification encompasses many aspects including such items as best practices, rigorous testing according to industry standards, and third-party oversight.

Every industry has a common goal; to satisfy customers and protect its reputation. There is no doubt it is an advantage for industries to strive to meet this goal. Product certification allows for an industry to take forward strides in achieving this goal. Product certification is a true "win-win" for businesses and consumers alike – it promotes the industry while, at the same time, provides assurance to its customers that they are getting a quality product.

Certification is a reliable way an industry can direct consumers to products that most effectively do what they want.

Water Treatment Industry Toolkit

More about The Water Quality Association
The Water Quality Association advocates for the water treatment industry and its technologies. WQA members make and sell products such as treatment systems at the faucet, whole-house improvement devices, water softeners, and more. These products fall under two different categories: point-of-use (POU) and point-of-entry (POE) systems that improve water quality in a home.

WQA's Gold Seal Certification Program is dedicated to providing public health and safety services throughout the USA and globally, and maintaining expert service, superior reputation, and fair pricing.

The Water Quality Associations Water Treatment Industry Toolkit
The Water Quality Association provides these fact sheets and resource guides as a service to its members, policymakers, and the general public. They are designed to promote discussion on key issues through facts and data.

Learn more

- Water Quality Association:
  www.wqa.org
- WQA Gold Seal:
  www.wqa.org/goldseal
- Products certified by NSF International:
  www.nsf.org/Certified/DWTU
- Product Certification Programs,
  a summary of current standards:
  www.ul.com

For more information contact:

Water Quality ASSOCIATION

International Headquarters and Laboratory

4151 Naperville Road
Lisle, IL 60532-3696 USA
Phone: 630 505 0160
Fax: 630 505 9637
Web site: www.wqa.org

A not-for-profit organization

Product Certification

Water Treatment Industry Toolkit

Water Quality ASSOCIATION

*Courtesy of The Water Quality Association
A not-fot-profit organization*

Water improvement and product certification

The need for a Final Barrier at the faucet is becoming increasingly more popular and, in some cases, necessary. Consumers are no longer relying solely on public water treatment systems. They are looking for additional ways to improve their health and protect against unseen water quality issues that may be picked up in transit from the central treatment facility or within household or workplace plumbing. A growing industry is dedicated to promoting this Final Barrier goal, and marketing for these types of products has become a regular staple throughout the media.

What many members of the public and even policymakers may not know is that a rigid system of certification, which includes testing, is available to help consumers choose water improvement products that will treat the specific water issues they are dealing with.

Through a rigorous system of certification, products are evaluated to determine whether their stated claims on safety and on reliability are substantiated or not.

Several independent bodies offer a product certification program. One of the largest is the Water Quality Association, where the Gold Seal Program adheres to the best practices of testing and approval. The Gold Seal Program offers certification of all products and chemicals that contact drinking water.

Other bodies providing certification for some or all water treatment products on the market are: Canadian Standards Association (CSA), International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAMPO), NSF International, and UL (Underwriters Laboratory).

Currently, hundreds of companies have gone through product certification for tens of thousands of products.

Accreditation:
Ensuring independence and quality

The question often comes up, who polices the police?

In order for an organization to be considered reputable and reliable, it should be accredited. Accreditation demonstrates that the certification body is competent and consistent in conducting certification of like products.

In North America, the two main accreditation bodies that provide approval for product certification bodies are the highly respected ANSI (American National Standards Institute) and SCC (Standards Council of Canada). With decades of experience upholding exacting standards, ANSI and SCC "give the seal of approval" for groups that provide seals of approval. ANSI alone represents the interests of more than 125,000 companies and 3.5 million professionals.

How testing works

When a company wants to certify one of its products, WQA or another certification body is contacted. Under the testing portion of the certification requirements, there are a few different categories under which products can be tested according to:

- Material safety
- Structural Integrity
- Performance

When testing, sample products are submitted to be examined according to industry standard protocols.

These protocols provide technicians the testing procedures to ensure that all certified products are tested in an equivalent manner. These protocols examine how the product withstands numerous challenges, including factors such as stringent influent challenge water, aggressive water usage patterns, and testing beyond 100% of the filter's capacity.

Consumers need to be confident that marketing meets reality. Under the literature review protocol, any performance claims that are being made are validated by the testing. Nonvalidated claims are removed or delineated. During the literature review process, changes will be requested for any data that does not match up with the test data and all changes must be approved prior to implementation. The facility assessment process verifies that the correct version of literature is sent out with the products, as well as that there are quality control systems in place consistent with the duplication of products.

Certification and testing:
A great American tradition

Government regulation will always be necessary to provide basic protection to the public. Access to civil courts must always be available, too, for consumers to have a forum to settle disputes. But, voluntary certification also forms a major part of our free enterprise system. It helps companies retain the confidence of their customers and provides consumers with assurance that products have been rigorously tested.

When done properly, testing and certification can mean less burden on already overworked bureaucracies and less red tape which, ultimately, results in getting quality products to consumers in an efficient and trustworthy way.

Product certification standards

Standards are the guidelines used to test and certify products. There are many standards applicable to POU/POE devices -- systems that treat water at or near the tap. They include:

- Standard 42: Drinking Water Treatment Units – Aesthetic Effects – Contaminants that can affect the taste, odor, and color of the drinking water, including many USEPA secondary contaminants.
- Standard 44: Cation Exchange Water Softeners – Customary water softeners designed to remove water hardness and reduce other contaminants.
- Standard 53: Drinking Water Treatment Units – Health Effects – Contaminants that may affect human health if present in concentrations exceeding regulatory levels.

- Standard 55: Ultraviolet Microbiological Water Treatment Systems – Systems that use ultraviolet technology to reduce microbiological contaminants in water.
- Standard 58: Reverse Osmosis Drinking Water Treatment Systems – Systems where water is forced by pressure through a semipermeable reverse osmosis membrane, treating many of the heavy metals, arsenic, nitrates, and total dissolved solids.
- Standard 60: Drinking Water System Chemicals – Health Effects – Health effects requirements for chemicals used in drinking water systems.

- Standard 61: Drinking Water System Components – Health Effects – Health effects requirements for products, components, and materials used in drinking water systems.
- Standard 62: Drinking Water Distillation Systems – Systems that reduce dissolved contaminants by heat converting water to vapor and subsequent condensation to liquid, treating many inorganic and microbiological contaminants along with some larger organic contaminants.
- Standard 372: Drinking Water System Components – Lead Content – Lead content requirements for products, components, and materials used in drinking water systems.