

Regular Retesting Demonstrates Integrity of Our Industry and its Products

In recent months, some clients of the Water Quality Association's Product Certification Program have questioned the Association's policy on retesting of already certified products. WQA and other certifiers of water treatment products, including NSF International and Underwriters Laboratories, require products to be regularly retested in order to maintain their certified status. In conformance with industry best practices, WQA requires the products it certifies to be retested once every one to five years, depending on product type. In certain cases, retesting on an even more frequent basis may be required. This is because product certification is not a "one and done" type of process, but rather one designed to verify integrity.

"We want our clients to understand that there are very good reasons why retesting is the preferred practice among certification bodies," remarks Tom Spoden, WQA Product Certification Director. "It produces significant benefits for the consumer, the product's manufacturer, and the water treatment industry as a whole."

Product certification, Spoden explains, is not unlike the steps a person must go through to attain and retain a driver's license. One must pass written and road (performance) tests in order to be granted a driver's license, and depending on the state, renew the license after a certain number of years by demonstrating the continued ability to drive safely. This helps ensure that the people with whom we share our roads know how to drive in a safe and controlled manner.

Products that have been tested and certified by certification bodies provide assurance for consumers. It proves to consumers that their product performs as advertised and that the product is safe to use. The process of regularly retesting a certified product validates that the product operates as safely and efficiently as when it first became certified.

“In order for the certification mark to truly have meaning, consumers need to be able to trust the meaning behind that mark,” he adds. “As a product certifier, it’s our job to make sure that people trust WQA’s Gold Seal as an indicator of a product’s quality regardless of whether it was first certified yesterday or ten years ago.”

Retesting verifies that the materials used to manufacture the product remain safe, that the manufacturing process has not been changed, and ultimately that the product continues to meet the performance standards to which it was originally certified. Without a consistent retest, there would not be a way to ensure that the materials being used have not changed at the supplier level and are still deemed safe or that the product still performs as claimed.

The retesting requirement also has benefits for the product’s manufacturer. It helps protect manufacturers of drinking water treatment systems and components by ensuring that quality systems and supply chains are closely reviewed on a regular basis. This provides a means for the manufacturer to be vigilant toward identifying unwarranted or unknown changes in the supply chain. Furthermore, it helps manufacturers meet and keep up with the ever-changing requirements of the regulatory realm through adoption of methods for compliance by standards.

For example, with new lead-free compliance regulations the addition of NSF/ANSI standard 372 gave manufacturers an option to certify or comply with lead-free regulations. During recertification, WQA works with manufacturers to determine the most cost-efficient way to retest their product and provide knowledge on changing regulations which may impact their product.

“If there is not a retesting procedure in place, manufacturers have to deal with the unexpected and, most likely, unbudgeted cost, which can then possibly hinder their business,” Spoden points out.

“However, if a manufacturer works with a certification body that has a retesting procedure in place the

company may already have planned for retesting and accounted for it in their budget, making these unexpected requirements less of a burden.”

Perhaps the most important benefit of retesting is the integrity and credibility that it brings to the industry. The water sector, in general, has faced significant scrutiny regarding the health and safety of products that come in contact with drinking water.

“If product certification bodies eliminate or even reduce the frequency of their retesting requirement, our industry would be open to backlash, more scrutiny and even heavier laws and regulations,” adds David Loveday, WQA Government Affairs Director. “Product testing and certification offer a means by which our industry can regulate itself and avoid additional scrutiny by government entities. If legislators and regulators lose trust in our ability to self-regulate, it would be potentially disastrous for our industry.”

In conclusion, the retesting of certified water treatment products should not be viewed as a burden, but rather as a benefit and type of protection to manufacturers, the consumers who rely on their products and the industry as a whole. Regular retesting helps ensure the quality of materials, performance of products and integrity of WQA’s Gold Seal and the mark of other product certification programs.

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