Reactive Guidance on RSB-PRO-70-001: audit schedule changes due to conditions beyond the control of POs and CBs

24th June 2020 – version 2.2

1. Interpretation requested for the following scenario:

An RSB certified PO asked about the RSB position regarding changes related to the RSB audit type and/or schedule due the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Most areas of the world have travel restrictions and companies have their own policies to protect their employees.

Ensuring the health and safety of all people/staff involved in RSB audits is a priority, in line with RSB principles. Therefore, this guidance covers the conditions under which the RSB allows CBs to change audit schedules and/or to perform remote audits, considering travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Applicable Standards

1. RSB-PRO-70-001[1] , Section H1.5. "Audit Plan" specifies the audit type (on-site or desk-based) for each type of operator and RSB scheme (RSB Global, RSB EU RED,RSB CORSIA and RSB Japan FIT) as well as conditions to conduct desk-based audits.

2. Section H.3.5 (RSB-PRO-70-001) "Extension of the certificate validity and/or audit schedule changes" defines the conditions under which the CB may extend the specified period of validity of a certificate and/or delay the required audit schedule once per certification cycle, based on the PO risk class for 3 months (medium risk) or 6 months (low risk). The conditions include factors that are beyond the control of the PO and the CB.

3. Guidance

- **3.1 Guidance on remote audits**

    a) In line with H.1.5. (RSB-PRO-70-001) "Audit Plan", CBs can assess whether an audit can be conducted remotely.

    b) Considering the exceptional circumstances created by the COVID-19 outbreak, operators may request, in addition to the specifications of H.1.5. (RSB-PRO-70-001), that a remote audit is conducted for certification, re-certification and surveillance

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[1] RSB Procedure for Certification Bodies and Auditors: https://rsb.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/RSB-PRO-70-001-vers-3.5-Requirements-CBs-and-Auditors.pdf

audits, instead of an on-site audit. The following process shall be undertaken to assess if a request is granted:

1. The operator shall submit the request to the contracted Certification Body and inform RSB (aurea.nardelli@rsb.org and info@rsb.org). The request shall include the following information:
   - the scope of certification, including at a minimum information about the certification scheme applicable (eg. RSB Global or RSB EU RED); entities and facilities; inputs and outputs to be certified;
   - specification of the documents that the auditor will receive;
   - the systems that the auditor will be able to remotely access; and
   - the completed RSB Risk Assessment Tool.
2. The certification body will assess whether the documentation and systems to be provided by the operator are sufficient to conduct the audit remotely and send the proposed agenda to the PO and the RSB Secretariat;
3. The RSB Secretariat will inform the operator and the certification body if the request is granted or refused;
4. If the request is granted, and the audit is carried out remotely, the following audit (within 12 months of the issuance of the certificate) shall be an on-site audit. Please note there are specific provisions for RSB EU RED audits which are described under (c) below.

Note 1: The RSB Secretariat may deny the request independent from the opinion of the Certification Body based on an internal risk assessment.

Note 2: During the remote audit, the auditor will assess the documentation provided, conduct interviews and remotely access operator systems. If the evidence that can be provided remotely is not sufficient to verify the compliance of the operator with the RSB Standards and Procedures, the auditor may still request an on-site audit to be conducted.

c) For RSB EU RED audits, the European Commission communication to Voluntary Schemes concerning audits during the period of COVID-19 outbreak shall be considered by the RSB Secretariat in the evaluation of requests. Based on the current communication dated 12th June 2020, the following guidance is valid:

1. New RSB EU RED certification (main audits/initial audits): are not allowed to be remote. Initial audits also include first audits of economic operators who have in the past been certified by another scheme or audits of a new site of an operator who is already certified for another site.

2. RSB EU RED surveillance audits: remote audits may be granted; the requests will be assessed by the RSB Secretariat following the process described under section (b) above, steps (1) to (3);

3. RSB EU RED recertification audits (for certified POs whose certificates have expired from the 1st of March 2020: remote audits may be granted; the requests will be assessed by the RSB Secretariat following the process described under the section (b) above, (1) to (3).

Please note: While the COVID crisis is still ongoing, travel restrictions have been lifted progressively in an increasing number of countries. The EU Commission decided that the

end date for the possibility to carry out remote recertification and surveillance audits in any country shall be the last day of the month during which travel restrictions have been lifted. The implications may therefore vary between different countries and regions as well as between different auditors (in case additional travel restriction applying to auditors).

The date by which the required on-site audits complementing the remote audits have to be done is being extended to five months after the above-mentioned end date of remote audits. Certification Bodies are required to complement remote audits with an on-site RSB EU RED audit which would have normally been carried out as per the requirements of RSB-PRO-70-001.

An exception of having to complement the remote audits by onsite audits can be accepted to avoid excessive burden in limited cases where the risk of non-compliance and fraud can be expected to be low. This can be assumed to be the case for operators at the origin of the chain of custody of agricultural raw materials (up to and including the first gathering points) which have successfully passed the previous audit.

- **3.2 Guidance on extending the certificate validity and delaying audit schedules**

  a) For audits that do not allow for remote assessments, the requirements of H.3.5 (RSB-PRO-70-001) "Extension of the certificate validity and/or audit schedule changes", includes provisions for conditions that are beyond the control of the POs and CBs (force majeure). The COVID-19 outbreak is considered a force majeure globally, with the number of confirmed cases increasing rapidly and more and more countries implementing drastic measures limiting domestic and international travel, as well as stopping various non-essential activities.

  b) If the COVID-19 situation does not improve within the accepted 3 months for medium risk or 6 months for low risk operators, the responsible Certification Body shall report the locations of the planned on-site audit to the RSB Secretariat who will evaluate the situation and decide on a case-by-case basis.

  c) For RSB EU RED audits, based on current communication from the European Commission dated 12th June 2020, the validity of certificates that have expired since the 1st of March 2020 can be extended up to and including the 1st of July.
  After the 1st of July 2020, Certification Bodies will be required to conduct remote recertification audits, in line with the RSB-PRO-70-001, for the cases where the guidance described under the topic 3.1 (c) of this document is applied.

  Please note: All requirements specified in H.3.5 (RSB-PRO-70-001) must be met in order to extend the certificate validity and/or the audit schedule. Participating Operators that have been assigned a high-risk class as per RSB Procedure for Risk Management (RSB-PRO-60-001)[2] are not allowed any extension, as specified in RSB-PRO-70-001, H.3.5.

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[2] https://rsb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/RSB-PRO-60-001-vers-3.2-Procedure-for-Risk-Management.pdf