



Quality Certification Alliance

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Measuring and Defining Labor Rights Compliance in Manufacturing

“Compliance” is alternatively defined as the “act or process of complying to a desire, demand or proposal or to coercion,” “the act of conforming, acquiescing or yielding,” and “the act of cooperation or obedience.”

As “compliance” is used in relation to the standards advocated by QCA, it is complying to regulatory and legal standards, best practice standards and other applicable voluntary standards as appropriate. Companies’ practices that have been accredited under the auspices of QCA are deemed to MEET OR EXCEED requirements, whether those requirements are regulatory (legal) in nature or best practices.

Social Accountability Compliance

Social accountability in the manufacturing sector has come to mean the environment under which an item was manufactured as pertaining to labor. These programs are frequently referred to as labor standards or ethical manufacturing programs. Social accountability policies are designed to ensure minimum protections are provided to workers who produce the product that is then sold / provided to the end user.

Social accountability is measured and assessed by a range of organizations from quasi-governmental organizations (UN-sponsored organizations) to trade organizations to issue-oriented causes to private industry and, of course, local and national governments.

Social accountability is measured and monitored in the United States under the auspices of the Department of Labor (DOL), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and your local fire district to name just a few. Most offshore production countries have similar government organizations in place to perform these tasks, as well.

QCA-accredited companies have policies, procedures and protocols that effectively address local and national laws as related to labor compliance in their domestic facilities. They also maintain a supply chain policy that assures these guarantees are also extended to the workforce manufacturing the product that is imported on the accredited company’s behalf.

Social Accountability Best Practices

Best practices are those activities implemented by individual companies that assist in achieving compliance over a set of processes. Not all accredited companies will adopt identical best practices. Companies frequently have different methodologies for achieving the same outcome. Arguably, best practices are considered to be strategic decisions on the part of a company given their internal structure, size and product line.

Best practices advocated for the predictability they provide assuring compliance with manufacturing standards related to labor include, but are not limited to:

- Written statement signed by manufacturers acknowledging the requirements
- Supply chain partner completed self-assessment documenting social accountability systems and practices for assuring compliance
- Manufacturer-based accreditation
- Supplier scorecards incorporating onsite evaluation
- Corrective action documentation
- Appointment of a compliance officer to communicate with supply base and monitor progress

Do Social Accountability Programs Measure Human Rights?

Social accountability programs have become prolific over the past 20 years as manufacturing went offshore and the consumer had less visibility to the manufacturing base. Initially, labor standards were interpreted through UN guidelines on human rights that banned slavery, bonded labor, forced labor child labor and discrimination. The programs came to be known as “human rights” programs, which, when considering the range of concerns addressed under such assessments today far too limited as a comprehensive definition.

The term “ethical manufacturing practices” better captures the focus and intent of these programs as they have evolved: The metrics addressed under these programs reflect the concerns of the program’s advocates and generally include not only human rights, but also legal standards in both the manufacturing and importing countries and, in some cases, organizational values.

Social accountability assessments include manufacturing practices as related to:

Management Practices Controls

Child Labor

Forced Labor

Health and Safety

Freedom of Association

Nondiscrimination

Disciplinary

Harassment and Abuse

Working Hours

Wages and Compensation

Environmental Quality

QCA Monitoring Standard and Capacity Building

QCA advocates the United Nations’ Global Compact as the standard against which a company’s social accountability policies are assessed. The Global Compact incorporates bans on use of labor violating human rights as recognized by the UN. It also incorporates standards that rely on interpretations of national and local law pertaining to labor. The Global Compact takes social accountability out of the realm of a value judgment by contracting countries into the realm of the domestic law of the manufacturing base.

Supply base partners are clearly most proximal to the labor-related activities occurring within their facility and in the best position to deploy systems that reflect the requirements of local law. They are also in the best position to determine whether they are able to meet more stringent best practice requirements that customers may require related to labor standards that exceed local requirements that will permit them to compete for that business. QCA advocates scientific management practices that allow visibility to quantifiable measures. If a process can be measured, it can be improved. Through the corrective process, supply chain partners are able to ensure ongoing capacity building for themselves.

Production-based standards such as Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production (WRAP) and the International Council of Toy Industries' Caring, Awareness, Responsible, Ethical manufacturing processes program (ICTI CARE) also recognize the importance of self-directed capacity building principles and are recognized by QCA.