Compostable Materials
Certification Scheme

FAQs

for producers

1. "What is the typical timescale for achieving certification?"

This will depend on whether the product has already been tested according to the applicable standard. Testing typically comprises the most amount of time in the initial certification process. The application and conformity assessment can take approximately two months in total, depending on whether any additional information is required.

If the full suite of tests is required, the initial process for 'industrially compostable' (EN 13432) certification can take approximately eight months. The biodegradation test can take up to six months, which is the maximum for compliance with EN 13432.

For 'home compostable' certification, if the full suite of tests is required, the initial process can take approximately fourteen months. The biodegradation test can take up to 12 months, which is the maximum for compliance with NF T51-800 / AS 5810.

2. "What are the typical costs for certification?"

The total costs for initial certification can vary significantly depending on which tests are required (if any). If testing has already taken place and only a conformity assessment is needed, the associated certification fees can be found in our schedule of fees document available to download from here. The minimum cost for initial certification for one product (not including testing fees) is approx. £2250 (depending on the conversion rate).

If the product has not yet been tested, there will be additional costs, as testing fees will be charged by an approved laboratory. These fees can vary widely depending on which tests are required. If components of the product have already been tested and/or certified, it is likely that certain tests can be avoided, and therefore the costs could be reduced significantly.

For initial certification, we recommend that producers apply for a technical pre-assessment and obtain a detailed quotation from the certification body. The technical pre-assessment will determine whether a product is suitable for certification and whether any tests can be omitted from the full suite before testing takes place. A detailed quotation can be provided, covering both the testing and certification fees.

The annual licence fee for the use of each of these marks owned by REAL is £100.00.

3. "What are the benefits of joining the CMCS?"

- ✓ The opportunity to use certification mark(s) developed specifically for the UK market. The mark design is familiar to UK consumers (e.g., recycling labels) and shows clearly whether the product is suitable for home or industrial composting.
- ✓ Having access to a UK-based certification organisation, the only one in the UK.
- ✓ The associated costs of joining the CMCS are relatively low with no additional testing or certification fees, only an additional low-cost licence fee for the use of the mark(s).

- ✓ Products can be searched for, and effectively marketed, on our website with complementary guidance on appropriate treatment options.
- ✓ REAL will actively promote the CMCS, thereby promoting producers' brands.

4. "What are the key requirements of the standards for 'compostability'?"

There are several nationally and internationally accepted standards for the certification of compostable materials and these all rely on the same four general criteria for certification: disintegration, ultimate biodegradability, ecotoxicity and chemical analysis.

The Compostable Materials Certification Scheme is aligned with the standard EN 13432 for goods to be decomposed through industrial processes and the French standard NF T51-800 / Australian standard AS 5810 for goods to be decomposed in home composting processes. The certification criteria for both processes are very similar with due allowance being made for the much smaller mass of compost and reduced management standards that will be found in domestic processes.

All certified products must disintegrate within a specified time to a point where at least 90% of the item passes through a 2mm sieve. Disintegration is the physical breakdown of material into very small pieces. For industrial processes, this level of disintegration must be reached within 84 days at a test temperature of more than 40 °C. For home compostable, the same level of disintegration must be reached in 180 days at a test temperature of around 25 °C. The resulting compost is analysed and needs to fulfil specific criteria.

Biodegradability tests measure the degree to which the item being tested is degraded by microorganisms under simulated composting conditions to produce carbon dioxide, water and minerals. For industrial processes this must be at least 90% of that achieved by a reference sample within 180 days at a temperature of 58 °C. For home compostable products the same level of biodegradation must be reached within one year at a temperature of 25 °C.

The compost created in the disintegration test is used in an eco-toxicity test, where two species of plants are grown on samples of the compost. In all cases the germination rate and biomass of these plants must be at least 90% of the values from a blank sample.

In all cases, samples of the product are tested for levels of 10 metals and elemental fluorine within a chemical analysis.

One additional toxicity testing for home compostability defined in AS 5810 are earthworm tests. Here earthworms are brought in contact with the resulting compost. After 14 days the difference in the morbidity and mean weight of surviving worms between the treated compost and the control must not be greater than 10%.

5. "If I pass home compostable tests, will I also industrially compostable tests?"

No not necessarily. If a product is certified as home compostable, it is not automatically certified industrially compostable. A separate conformity assessment will need to take place and a separate certificate will need to be issued.

Please note that a compostable product is only accepted for composting at a commercial facility (producing compost certified to BSI PAS 100) if it has been independently tested and certified to the standards BS EN 13432, BS EN 14995, or ASTM D6400.