



An initiative of the EPFL Energy Center

*Ensuring that biofuels deliver on their promise of sustainability*

## RSB Certification: Frequently Asked Questions

For general information about the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels (RSB) and the RSB standards, please consult the *RSB Factsheet*, the *RSB FAQs*, or visit [www.rsb.org](http://www.rsb.org).

### What is the RSB certification system?

The RSB certification system provides sustainability certification to operators and products by independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party *Certification Bodies* (ie. auditors). Certificates of compliance are delivered to operators that are evaluated as compliant with the RSB Principles & Criteria and other relevant components of the *RSB Global Sustainability Standard*. The *RSB Global Sustainability Standard* is composed of normative documents, which describe the sustainability rules and requirements for operators and products. The evaluation of compliance takes several aspects of the operations into consideration (size, practices, local context) in order to adapt the audit procedure to every particular situation and avoid unnecessary costs. In order to facilitate access for small operators and reduce auditing costs, group certification is allowed under certain conditions. Ultimately, the RSB aims to be the "one-stop shop" for compliance with various biofuel sustainability regulations and seeks to be recognized by market regulators, such as the European Union.

### How flexible is the RSB certification system?

The RSB system is designed to balance robustness and flexibility, in order to offer a practical system adapted to the situation of each and every operator while

avoiding risks of the standard being breached. The certification incorporates user-friendly solutions such as an online risk assessment tool and a greenhouse gas calculator called *The RSB Tool*. In order to allow more flexibility to biofuel blenders and retailers, the life-cycle greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are calculated for a blend of biofuels with different GHG performances, as long as they each individually achieve better GHG performance than fossil fuel and the overall blend achieves 50% GHG savings compared to fossil fuel.

### What is the RSB Tool?

The RSB Tool is a user-friendly, freely-available online application, which allows compliance-check and GHG calculation. It was developed by the RSB in conjunction with the Swiss Federal Laboratories for Materials Science and Technology (EMPA) and with the technical assistance from the University of Applied Sciences Berlin. The user can check compliance with the RSB Principles & Criteria and Indicators, perform a Self Risk Assessment according to the RSB Standard for Risk Management, and calculate lifecycle GHG emissions using different methodologies, including the methodologies of the RSB, EU RED, and others.

### What are the Chain of Custody options?

RSB Participating Operators may choose between several Chain of Custody options according to their needs in terms of traceability:

- Identity preserved
- Segregation of product

- Mass balance
- Content ratio accounting

### Which products and which operators can be RSB certified?

The RSB certification system applies to both operators and products.

Certifiable products include:

- Biomass products that can be processed into biofuel or bioenergy, e.g. crop, agricultural residues, forestry products, industry byproducts, wastes, algae, etc.
- Processed biomass, such as Straight Vegetal Oil (SVO), sugarcane juice, etc.
- Biofuel, such as bioethanol, biobutanol, ETBE, biodiesel, FAME, biomass pellets, etc.
- Any mixture of biofuels blended together.

To be allowed to make a "claim", an operator needs to be certified. Any operator in the value chain handling intermediary and final products may seek certification, from farmer to the final retailer.

### Why should my organization become RSB certified?

The RSB certification offers a global, recognized and verifiable standard, developed through a multi-stakeholder process. It provides certainty amid the growing patchwork of voluntary certification schemes that a certain product adheres to sustainability criteria. It addresses a growing demand among both the private sector and government entities for a universal standard – a seal of approval – guaranteeing a biofuels' social and environmental performance. It is

the goal of the RSB that RSB Certificates should ultimately provide operators with automatic access to participating markets (e.g. EU market under the provisions of the Renewable Energy Directive – Application for recognition by the EU is currently in process).

#### **How do I obtain certification?**

To become RSB certified, an operator must apply through *RSB Services* and be approved as a “Participating Operator” (PO). The complete application and certification process is described in the “RSB Handbook” and the brochure entitled “How to become RSB certified?” The main steps in the certification process are described below:

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##### **Step 1: Apply for RSB Certification**

Your application must be transmitted to *RSB Services* and include a *Self-Risk Assessment*, which determines your risk class, as well as a *Self-Evaluation* against the *RSB Global Sustainability Standard*, which describe your degree of compliance with the standard. Both the *Self-Risk Assessment* and the *Self-Evaluation* can be performed through the *RSB Tool* (soon online). Upon approval of your application by *RSB Services*, you will receive your RSB participant operator number and be provided with contacts at accredited third party *Certification Bodies*.

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##### **Step 2: Third Party Audit**

Once you and your *Certification Body* have contracted for the audit to be performed, your auditor will conduct a desk audit using the self –evaluation provided by RSB. They will then schedule onsite visits and conduct a field audit of each facility included in the scope of your application. The *Certification Body* will notify you before the onsite visit of the facilities and processes they require access to in order to minimize operational disruption. Upon successful completion of the audits, the *Certification Body* will issue a certificate of compliance. If the audits are unsuccessful, you will need to implement corrective measures and schedule new audits with the *Certification Body*.

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##### **Step 3: Licensing and certification**

The *Certification Body* will notify *RSB Services* with a recommendation for your licensure and certification. At this time *RSB Services* will activate your license, issue a press release, list you on its web site and send you

notification of how you can publicize your certification to your own customer and stakeholder community.

#### **When does the certification expire?**

The validity of RSB certificates varies depending the *Risk Class* attributed to the operations (See the Brochure: “How to become certified” for more information). It can go up to 24 months.

#### **Who are licensed third party auditors and how are they chosen?**

3<sup>rd</sup> party auditors are accredited by an officially recognized *Accreditation Body* according to transparent criteria, which ensure that the *RSB Global Sustainability Standard* is properly implemented.

#### **Does the audit evaluate operations that are not included in the self-assessment?**

At the moment of applying for certification, the operator shall decide about the scope of certification, i.e. the specific operations, assets and products to be submitted to the audit. Once the scope is approved by *RSB Services* and the *Certification Body*, the audit is restricted to this scope. Upon issuance of a certificate of compliance, related claims are limited to the agreed scope of certification.

#### **Can I access the risk self-assessment prior to beginning the application process?**

Yes, you can either use the *RSB Standard for Risk Management (RSB-STD-60-001)* or the *RSB Tool* to calculate your risk class prior to the application.

#### **What is the cost of RSB certification?**

The cost of certification varies by the size and scope of the operation and step in the chain of custody the operator occupies. The types of costs involved are as follows:

**Cost of compliance:** In some cases operators may incur additional expenses to bring operations into compliance with the RSB Principles & Criteria. These can vary depending on the nature and size of the operation.

**Audit:** The cost of an audit includes the daily fees and travel expenses of the auditor(s) who will visit your

operations or conduct a desk audit. This is greatly influenced by the size and complexity of the operation.

**Administrative and licensing fees:** There is a minimal cost of the application in addition to administrative and licensing fees.

The cost of certification is specific to a particular company or Participating Operator and will vary depending on the size and type of operation.

#### **Do I have to be an RSB member to gain certification for my biofuels?**

No, RSB membership is appropriate for organizations that would like to be actively involved in the development of the *RSB standards*. The same certification process equally applies to both RSB members and non-members.

#### **Do I need RSB certification to legally sell my biofuels?**

No, the RSB is a voluntary certification standard. The intent is that operations will find value in obtaining the certification standard, but there is no legal requirement to do so. Nevertheless, RSB certified operators are recognized by the German Government as compliant with the “Biokraftstoff-Nachhaltigkeitsverordnung - Biokraft-NachV”. In addition, operators may be recognized under certain statutory provisions as compliant with sustainability requirements included in legislation (e.g. EU Renewable Energy Directive).

#### **How can I contact the RSB?**

Email: [rsb@epfl.ch](mailto:rsb@epfl.ch)

Web: <http://www.rsb.org> | <http://www.rsb-services.com>

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