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1.0 OVERVIEW

level™ is a product certification program sponsored by the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) International. BIFMA provides and maintains the **level™** certification program and develops (through the ANSI consensus process) standards to define and measure the sustainable attributes of furniture products. BIFMA requires all products bearing the **level™** certification mark to be assessed for conformance to the BIFMA e3-2008 standard by a recognized third-party product certification body. Product certification bodies will certify that products conform to the standard and authorize the use of the **level™** certification mark in conjunction with the certified product.

The international criteria for the accreditation of product certification bodies operating product certification programs (tangible products, processes, and services) are detailed in ISO/IEC Guide 65, General requirements for bodies operating product certification systems.

This **level™** certification scheme specifies the minimum requirements that product certification bodies shall observe when operating third-party verification of product conformance to the **level™** standard and authorizing the use of the **level™** certification mark. It provides guidance on ISO/IEC Guide 65 in order to satisfy the requirements implicit in the certification of products for **level™** and provides the basis for consistent application of **level™** certification by product certification bodies. This document, with respect to the certification and labeling of products for **level™**, shall be read in conjunction with ISO/IEC Guide 65.

The requirements of this **level™** certification scheme are applicable to the product certification bodies. The **level™** requirements applicable to manufacturers are outlined in Appendix C of the **level™** certification program guidelines. Figure A-1 illustrates key elements of this product certification process and the relationships between BIFMA, the accreditation organization, the product certification body(ies), and applicant organizations.

Certification by a product certification body is not a statement that the product certification body guarantees the efficiency and performance of a **level™** labeled product. It is also not a guarantee that all of the aspects of the **level™** standard are being met or will continue to be met, at all times. The certification and labeling of a product for **level™** is a statement that the applicant organization's products have been produced in accordance with the **level™** standard, and that the validation and verification of conformance to the **level™** standard has been evaluated and determined to meet the necessary requirements by a recognized third-party certification body.

2.0 TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

2.1 Scope

This **level™** certification scheme specifies the minimum requirements that product certification bodies shall observe when operating a third-party verification of product conformance program to the **level™** standard and authorizing the use of the **level™** certification mark. It provides guidance on the use of ISO/IEC Guide 65 to satisfy the requirements implicit in the certification of products for **level™** and provides the basis for consistent application of **level™** certification by product certification bodies. This document, with respect to the certification and labeling of products for **level™**, shall be read in conjunction with ISO/IEC Guide 65. Where there is conflict between ISO/IEC Guide 65 and the **level™** certification scheme, the **level™** certification scheme will take precedence.

2.2 References

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this **level™** certification scheme. Undated references indicate that the latest edition of the referenced document applies.

- **level™** standard (BIFMA e3-2008) developed and maintained by BIFMA and NSF International.
- **level™** certification program guidelines developed and maintained by BIFMA.
- ISO/IEC Guide 65, General requirements for bodies operating product certification systems.
- IAF Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC Guide 65
- ISO/IEC 17000, Conformity assessment - Vocabulary and general principles.
- ISO/IEC 17011, Conformity assessment - General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies.

3.0 RECOGNITION OF THE PRODUCT CERTIFICATION BODY

Product certification bodies must operate a certification program in accordance with ISO/IEC Guide 65 to operate the **level™** certification scheme and certify products to the **level™** standard (BIFMA e3-2008). BIFMA will recognize certification bodies that:

- operate other product certification programs in accordance with ISO/IEC Guide 65;
- are accredited by an accrediting body that operates in accordance with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17011, offers accreditation services to ISO/IEC Guide 65, is an International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) Signatory, or International Accreditation Forum (IAF) Multi-lateral Recognition Agreement (MLA) Signatory; and
- commits to pursue similar accreditation of this **level™** certification scheme once that option is available.

The **level™** product standard (BIFMA e3-2008) must be listed in its Scope of Accreditation once that option is available.

4.0 PRODUCT CERTIFICATION SCHEME

4.1 Application for Product Certification

Applicant organizations seeking **level™** certification and the **level™** mark for their products must apply directly to a product certification body that is recognized for the **level™** program. The application shall be made on a form supplied by the product certification body and shall document the applicant organizations identity, the product identity, and help to define the scope of the certification.

The application shall define the specific product or group of products for which certification is requested by the applicant.

4.2 Certification

4.2.1 General

The product certification body shall comply with the requirements of ISO/IEC Guide 65. Upon confirmation of the acceptance of the application, the product certification body shall make the necessary arrangements with the applicant organization for the certification in accordance with this **level™** certification scheme. The comprehensive review of objective evidence shall include an onsite evaluation.

4.2.2 Organization Evaluation

The product certification body shall conduct a comprehensive review of objective evidence to ensure conformance to the organizational requirements of the standard for purposes of initial certification and at least every three years thereafter.

4.2.3 Facility Evaluation

The product certification body shall conduct a comprehensive review of objective evidence to ensure conformance to the facility related requirements of the standard for purposes of initial certification and at least every three years thereafter.

4.2.4 Product Evaluation

4.2.4.1 Evaluation

The product certification body shall complete a comprehensive review of objective evidence to ensure conformance to the product related requirements of the standard for purposes of initial certification and at least every three years thereafter.

4.2.4.2 Evaluation Report

The product certification body shall inform the applicant via a full report on the outcome of the evaluation. The report shall include the total number of points accumulated by the product(s) being evaluated, the total number of product related points amassed, and the specific credits/points achieved. The conformance designation shall be stated as follows:

level™ 1	32 to 44 total points; at least 5 of which are product related points
level™ 2	45 to 62 total points; at least 11 of which are product related points

level™ 3 63 to 90 total points; at least 18 of which are product related points

4.3 Licensing

4.3.1 Certification Mark License Agreement (between Product Certification Body and BIFMA)

The product certification body shall sign the Certification Mark License Agreement, in the form attached as Appendix B, with BIFMA prior to receiving recognition to certify and label products for **level™**. This license agreement provides the conditions for authorizing the use of the **level™** certification mark by applicant organizations for certified products.

As part of the responsibilities for certifying products and authorizing the use of the **level™** certification mark, the product certification body shall also provide BIFMA with ongoing support including:

- Provide BIFMA data on certified products. Product certification bodies shall maintain a listing of all **level™** labeled products on their respective Web sites. In addition, BIFMA will require the product certification bodies to submit an updated list monthly so that BIFMA's **level™** Web registry remains current. The data shall be provided to BIFMA in a format compatible with the **level™** Web registry database. The data provided to BIFMA shall include:
 - the applicant organizations identity, contact information, the product identity, and help to define the scope of the certification.
 - Certification body name
 - Certification/certificate number; and
 - Certification date and expiration date; and
 - Version/revision level of the standard product was evaluated to.
- Notify BIFMA of any **level™** mark withdrawals, or mark misuse and dispute actions. BIFMA will rely on the product certification bodies to address product nonconformance, mark misuse, and dispute resolution. Accordingly, product certification bodies shall provide BIFMA with notification of any **level™** mark withdrawals, within 30 days of occurrence.
- Allow BIFMA to accompany accreditation organization on routine assessments. BIFMA reserves the right, for BIFMA staff or agents acting on behalf of BIFMA, to accompany the accreditation organization on any routine or follow-up assessments of the product certification body's accreditation as it relates to the **level™** program.

4.3.2 Certification Mark Authorization (between Product Certification Body and Applicant Organization)

When the certification decision has been made, the product certification body shall provide a certification decision to the applicant organization and authorize the use of the **level™** certification mark in conjunction with that certified product or group of products, in accordance with the certification mark license agreement (between the product certification body and BIFMA) and this **level™** certification scheme.

The product certification body shall monitor that the applicant organization of a **level™** labeled product abides by the policies outlined in the **level™** certification mark use guidelines.

Allow BIFMA to accompany certification bodies on routine assessments. BIFMA reserves the right, for BIFMA staff or agents acting on behalf of BIFMA, to accompany the certification body on any routine or follow-up assessments of the applicant organization as it relates to the **level™** program.

4.4 Appeals to the Product Certification Body

The product certification body shall exercise an appeals procedure in accordance with ISO/IEC Guide 65.

4.5 Confidentiality

The product certification body shall establish confidentiality procedures in accordance with ISO/IEC Guide 65.

4.6 Use of the **level™** Certification Mark

The product certification body shall provide a unique identifier to be displayed in conjunction with the **level™** certification mark. The identifier shall be the product certification body's registered name or official acronym and shall be formatted and positioned to the right of the **level™** certification mark. The identifier shall be legible and shall be no taller than the height of the **level™** certification mark itself. BIFMA will provide to the product certification body a copy of the mark the product certification body shall authorize applicant organizations to use in conjunction with **level™** labeled products.

The product certification body shall provide to the applicant organization of a certified product, the appropriate **level™** certification mark artwork and shall monitor that the applicant organization applies and uses the **level™** certification mark in accordance with the **level™** certification mark guidelines. Use of the **level™** certification mark by an applicant organization is voluntary.

4.7 Publicity About a **level™** Labeled Product

The applicant organization of a certified product shall have the right to publish the fact that it has been authorized to apply the **level™** certification mark on products to which the certification applies. The certification mark may be used in promotional literature

published about the product by the applicant organization, its wholesalers, distributors, or retailers, as long as it is in direct correlation to the product. The **level™** certification mark must not be used to signify **level™** labeling of every product from the applicant organization and may never be used to imply direct endorsement of an applicant organization or product by BIFMA.

The appropriate product certification body shall assist BIFMA in monitoring that the relevant applicant organization(s) adhere(s) to the policies outlined in the **level™** certification mark use guidelines.

4.8 Misuse of the Certification or **level™** Certification Mark

The product certification body shall take appropriate action when an applicant organization of a product it has certified engages in unauthorized, incorrect, or misleading use of the certification or **level™** mark, whether it is discovered by the product certification body or is brought to its attention. Circumstances for unauthorized, incorrect, or misleading use of the certification or **level™** mark are described in the **level™** program guidelines and the **level™** certification mark guidelines.

The product certification body shall bring to BIFMA's attention, any instances of unauthorized use of a **level™** certification mark by an applicant organization of a product that has not been certified. BIFMA will engage in appropriate action with the infringing organization.

4.9 Extending a Certification

Applicant organizations shall apply to the product certification body to obtain an extension of an existing certification for additional types or models of products, or intended modifications to previously certified models. The product certification body, based on engineering judgment, shall determine if the additional types or models of products are significantly different than the products covered by the existing certification, to the extent that the modifications to the design would impact conformance to the **level™** specification. Based on this determination, the product certification body shall decide whether to require additional conformance evaluation. The engineering judgment must be documented and subjected to peer review by a technically competent person.

4.10 Surveillance

The product certification body shall, on an annual basis, complete a surveillance audit of the applicant organization. The purpose of this audit shall be to verify that the applicant organization continues to operate in a manner that will maintain a product's conformance with the standard. The scope of the audit shall include:

- Evaluate proper use of the **level™** certification mark.
- Evaluate conformance to all prerequisites in the standard.
- Evaluate conformance to an appropriate representative sample of the optional credits in the standard.

- Consider changes to the applicant organization's operations and certified products that may impact a product's conformance with the standard. If significant changes have not occurred, an onsite audit is not required.

4.11 Use of the **level™** Certification Mark on Products During a Probationary Period

The product certification body shall determine when probationary use of the **level™** certification mark may be warranted due to product nonconformance, improper use of the **level™** certification mark, or infringement of the **level™** certification scheme.

Probationary use of the mark is allowed for a limited period of time as specified by the product certification body.

The product certification body shall inform the applicant organization of the conditions under which the probationary level certification status can be removed (e.g., corrective actions that shall be taken). At the end of the probation period, the product certification body shall investigate whether the indicated conditions for reinstating the **level™** certification mark have been fulfilled. Upon receiving proof of fulfillment of these conditions, the product certification body shall notify the applicant organization that the probationary use has been removed. If at the end of the probation period, the indicated conditions for removing the probationary status have not been fulfilled, a withdrawal of the certification mark shall be considered.

4.12 Withdrawal of the **level™** Certification Mark from Products

In more severe or repeated instances of product non-conformity, misuse of the **level™** certification mark, or failure to meet the requirements for removal of probationary **level™** certification mark status, the product certification body shall withdraw a products' certification and the use of the **level™** certification mark. The product certification body shall inform the applicant organization that the certification and **level™** certification mark are being withdrawn via a withdrawal notification. If the **level™** certification mark is withdrawn from a product for any reason, the product certification body shall direct the applicant organization to notify its wholesalers, distributors, and retailers to immediately cease to use the certification mark in conjunction with that product, and the mark is to be eliminated from product packaging/promotional materials within six months from the date of withdrawal notification. The product certification body shall immediately notify BIFMA of any product withdrawals.

When issues related to product non-conformity or improper use of the **level™** certification mark come to the attention of BIFMA, BIFMA shall notify the appropriate product certification body of the product in question. The product certification body shall then engage in investigation and resolution of the complaint in accordance with ISO/IEC Guide 65 and the product certification body's policies and procedures.

4.13 Amendments to these Rules of Procedure

BIFMA reserves the right to amend these rules of procedure which may include amending the **level™** certification scheme, the **level™** program guidelines, or revising the **level™** standard.

Revisions to the **level™** standard can occur due to technological and/or market changes that affect the usefulness of current specifications to consumers, industry, or the environment. Revisions to specifications would require recertification of products to the new specifications. The transition period will normally be one year.