

GoodWeave International

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Complaints and Appeals

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OP Complaints and Appeals, v.2, 26 April 2011

Contact for Comments:
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For further information:
www.goodweave.org/governance/policies-procedures



Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Complaints and Appeals

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to describe the GoodWeave International (GWI) procedure for dealing with complaints and appeals. The procedure is designed to reflect GWI's commitment towards meeting the requirements of the ISEAL Codes of Good Practice¹ and ISO/IEC Guide 17065.

Definitions

- The GWI-Certification Division (GWI-CD) is the certification body for GWI. The 'Certification Committee' is the decision-making body of GWI-CD.
- An appeal is a formal expression of dissatisfaction by an affected party about a decision by GWI-CD regarding licensing or certification.
- A complaint is a formal expression of dissatisfaction by a third party related to the operation of any part of the GoodWeave system.
- 'Secretariat,' 'Board' and 'Executive Leadership Team (ELT)' are used in reference to GWI.
- The 'website' referred to below is www.GoodWeave.org.

2. GENERAL SCOPE AND PROCEDURE FOR COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

GWI strives to operate its certification program with due diligence. However, GWI recognizes that an important part of due diligence is careful and complete management of complaints and appeals such as:

- Complaints and appeals regarding certification decisions;
- Complaints regarding the conduct of personnel, including staff, committees, contractors, inspectors, and Board members; and
- Complaints regarding GoodWeave licensees.

In order for GWI to act on a complaint or appeal, the subject of the complaint must be under GWI's authority such as: disregard of policies, standards or operating procedures, arbitrary judgements, non-professional behaviour, financial mismanagement, unethical behaviour, discrimination, un-timeliness, violation of conflict of interest, or breach of confidentiality.

¹ ISEAL is the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance, which develops guidance and helps strengthen the effectiveness and impact of social and environmental voluntary standard systems.

Complaints may be lodged by any interested party that is not satisfied with the operations or decisions of GWI and GWI-CD personnel, its country programs, national affiliates or governance bodies. **Appeals** may only be brought forward by a party about which a licensing or certification decision was made. General procedures for receipt and initial processing of complaints and appeals are handled in a similar way, as described below, whereas decision-making authority is determined on the basis of the specifics of the case.

All of GWI's personnel involved in investigating or resolving complaints must be free from commercial, financial, and other pressures, which might influence the complaints process or decisions.

All decisions related to the status of the applicant or licensee remain in force until the complaint is settled. The cost of the complaints or appeals process is the responsibility of the party initiating the appeal.

2.1 Submission

Complaints and appeals must be submitted in writing to the Secretariat or GWI-CD, clearly stating that a complaint or appeal is being lodged, explaining the nature of the complaint or appeal and accompanied by documented evidence to support the claim and the signature of the complainant. A complaint must also contain a full explanation of the perceived problem including dates of events associated with the complaint and the names of the involved parties. Complaints and appeals may be submitted by email (to info@goodweave.org), fax or post (per contact data available on the website).

The Secretariat and GWI-CD each designates a responsible individual to serve as Complaints Administrator (CA). On receipt of a complaint or appeal from any stakeholder, the CA will confirm receipt in writing to the body making the complaint or appeal (hereafter 'claimant') within 10 working days.

2.2 Initial Screening

The CA evaluates whether the complaint or appeal meets the criteria described above and can thus be accepted into the procedure.

- If a complaint or appeal is accepted into the procedure, information about the acceptance is provided by the CA to the claimant within 10 working days. The CA then prepares to refer the complaint or appeal to the appropriate management personnel or governance committee and informs the claimant about the further steps and timelines. The CA's preparations may include requesting additional information from the claimant, collating data from other sources and drafting a response.
- If a complaint or appeal is rejected, the information about the applicable reasons is provided by the CA to the claimant within 10 working days. In this case the complaint is abandoned. The CA keeps a log of all complaints and appeals that were rejected.

- If rejected, the claimant may choose to pursue the complaint or appeal. In this case, the claimant is expected to amend its complaint or appeal in consideration of the reasons for rejection. The amended complaint or appeal is submitted to the CA, which confirms receipt within 10 working days and follows the screening procedure as described above to determine whether to accept or reject the amended complaint or appeal. If accepted, both the claimant and the decision-making body assigned to the case receive the amended complaint or appeal and the CA's response.

2.3 Review

Because of the wide variation in the types of complaints that may be received, the CA manages complaints on a case-by-case basis by designating the appropriate governance committee or management personnel, as indicated in the organizational chart (see the Secretariat Terms of Reference), to address each valid complaint. For example, where a complaint is lodged against the Executive Director, the complaint is handled by the Board. Complaints against GoodWeave standards are handled separately from complaints and appeals relating to certification decisions:

A complaint or appeal about certification might reasonably be made on the following grounds and is referred to the Certification Committee:

- There is evidence to indicate that a license or certification has been granted where an exporter or its subcontractors are not properly adhering to the GoodWeave Standard;
- There is evidence to demonstrate that a license or certification has been suspended or revoked where an exporter and its subcontractors are, in fact, adhering to the GoodWeave Standard; or
- There is evidence to indicate that one or more of GoodWeave personnel, units or committees did not properly adhere to the appropriate policies or operating procedures, in such a way as to lead to an improper certification decision.

Complaints against GoodWeave standards are referred to the Standards Committee or the ELT and may reasonably be made on the following grounds:

- The determination of a standard not adhering to the SOP Development of GoodWeave Standards; or
- The determination of a standard not adhering to the Project Description or Public Summary available on the website.

The assigned personnel or committee then proceeds to review the case to make a decision about the merits of the complaint or appeal within 30 days of receipt from the CA. During this time, the claimant or any other affected parties may be approached for clarification or additional information. If deemed necessary by the

personnel assigned to the case, arrangements are made for the claimant to be present or represented by a third party (if requested by the claimant) at the meeting at which the complaint or appeal is considered.

2.4 Decision on a Complaint

Once a complaint has been determined to have merit, the assigned personnel or committee then determines what further action and/or decision-making is needed to address the complaint. This may include requesting additional information, collating data from other sources or commissioning an investigation and preparing a response to the claimant. Information about the decision is provided by the CA to the claimant along with any available information about the further steps and timelines within 10 working days of notification of the decision.

In the case of a complaint relating to GoodWeave standards, the possible outcomes of the review of a complaint by the Standards Committee could be:

- The complaint may be accepted; in this case a new standard-setting or review project would be carried out.
- All or part of the standard against which a complaint is made may be declared as invalid; in this case the Standard Committee may substitute alternate wording or declare the previous version of the Standard as valid.
- The complaint may be declared valid but reconsidering the standard as per the complaint would not affect the application of the standard in practice; in this case the complaint would be taken into account at the next review of the corresponding standard.
- The complaint may be rejected; in this case the CA would communicate the reasons for the rejection to the claimant. No further complaint is possible.

In the case of a complaint relating to a certification decision, the possible outcomes of the review of the complaint by the Certification Committee could be:

- The complaint may be accepted; in this case a review of the relevant licensing or certification decision is carried out.
- The complaint may be rejected; in this case the CA communicates the reasons for the rejection to the claimant and the complaint is abandoned.
- All or part of a previous decision may be declared invalid and amended or reversed, or it may be declared as valid.
- All or part of the processes carried out by GoodWeave personnel relating to or informing the certification decision (e.g. inspection and monitoring) may be declared to have been carried out improperly and therefore appropriate corrective actions are determined.

In any case once a decision has been made, the claimant is informed about the final decision by the CA within 10 working days. The decision is final and no further complaint against the decision is possible.

2.5 Decision on an Appeal

In cases involving appeals, the Certification Committee reviews the details of the case and decides whether to accept the appeal and amend its previous decision. Once a decision has been made, the CA informs the claimant within 10 working days.

If not satisfied with the decision, the claimant may choose to pursue a final appeal. In this case, the claimant is expected to amend its appeal in consideration of the reasons given for the decision. In this case the Certification Committee cedes its decision-making authority to an Appeals Committee appointed by the Board. The amended appeal or complaint is submitted to the CA, which confirms receipt within 10 working days and informs the Board and the Certification Committee. The Board appoints a three-person Appeals Committee to consider the case from a roster of candidates maintained by the Secretariat that meet the qualifications for Certification Committee candidates (see Certification Committee Terms of Reference). This may include members of the Board or past members of the Certification Committee. The Appeals Committee shall follow the same general operating principles for decision-making used in other types of certification decisions and must complete review of the case within 30 days. The decision of the Appeals Committee is final and no further appeal against the decision is possible.

3. INFORMATION

Once an investigation has been completed, the claimant as well as the subject of the complaint or appeal are notified of the outcome. GWI reserves the right to inform its accreditors, regulatory authorities, licensees and the general public of the outcome of complaint procedure, per the GWI Confidentiality Policy.

4. DOCUMENTATION

A log of complaints and their outcomes is maintained by the Secretariat. All records related to a complaint, including the specifics of the case, dates, corrective actions taken by GWI and other parties in the case and the effectiveness of these actions, are kept for at least five years. Electronic copies are kept as existing and back-ups are made as often as deemed necessary.

5. REFERENCES

GWI Confidentiality Policy
SOP Development of GoodWeave Standards
Secretariat Terms of Reference
Certification Committee Terms of Reference

**Appendix:
Notification of Complaints and Appeals Procedure**

GoodWeave recognizes that an important part of due diligence in operating its programs is careful and complete management of complaints and appeals. Any interested party may submit a complaint or appeal regarding GoodWeave standards, certification decisions, conduct of GoodWeave personnel or other related matters.

Complaints and appeals must be submitted in writing, explaining the nature of the complaints or appeal, a full explanation of the perceived problem including dates of events and names of involved parties, if applicable, and accompanied by documented evidence to support the claim along with the signature of the complainant. Complaints and appeals may be submitted by email, fax or post to one of the following addresses:

GoodWeave International (GWI) Secretariat 2001 S Street NW, Suite 510 Washington, DC 20009 USA Fax: 202-234-9056 info@goodweave.org	GWI Certification Division S 14/81, A-5, 2nd Floor, Uday Complex, Maldahiya, Varanasi-221002 (U.P.) India Phone/Fax: +91-542-2201172 support@GoodWeave.net
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See **Standard Operating Procedure: Complaints and Appeals** available at www.goodweave.org/about/governance/policies-and-procedures for more information