Alaska Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) Certification Program

Quick Reference/Cheat Sheet and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Prepared by the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute
Original 9/5/16 – (updated 10/21/19)

Table of Contents

Click on a question and you will be taken to the appropriate page for the answer

Quick Reference/Cheat Sheet 3

1. What is the Alaska RFM Certification Program? 4

2. Why was Alaska RFM developed? 4

3. How is Alaska RFM the same/different from other certification programs? 4

4. What is the value proposition of the Alaska RFM Certification Program? 5

5. What are the benefits of Alaska RFM to a customer? 5

6. Who owns the Alaska RFM Certification Program? 5

7. When did the Alaska RFM Certification Program originate? 6

8. How is RFM funded? 6

9. Has RFM been benchmarked? 6

10. Why does it matter that Alaska RFM has GSSI recognition? 7

11. Which fisheries are Alaska RFM Certified? 8

12. Who are the fishery clients and what is their role? 9

13. During the assessment process, what are the key areas fisheries are evaluated against? 9

14. What is the length of a Fishery Certification Certificate and how often are the audits? 9

15. How was the Alaska RFM Fisheries Standard developed? 10

16. Who developed the Alaska RFM Fisheries Standard? 10

17. Is there a multi-stakeholder process for the Standard Development and Fishery Assessment process? 11

18. How often is the RFM Program reviewed and updated? 11

19. How often is the Fishery Standard reviewed and updated? 11

20. Why should a company go through Chain of Custody Certification? 11

21. What is the cost for Chain of Custody? 12

22. What is the length of the Chain of Custody Certificate? 12

23. Can a company use the same Certification Body for RFM and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Chain of Custody audits? 12

24. Where can I find a list of Alaska RFM Certified Companies? 12

25. How do I sign up for Chain of Custody? 12

26. What is the cost to use the Certified Sustainable Alaska RFM Seal? 13

27. How can a company demonstrate to consumers that a product is RFM certified? 13

28. Are there fisheries from outside Alaska using the RFM Certification model? 13

Alaska RFM Certification Program

Quick Reference/Cheat Sheet

- Alaska Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) is a third-party certification program for wild-capture fisheries, similar to the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), and Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP), and Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) on the aquaculture side.

- RFM provides Alaska fisheries and seafood customers with a credible and cost-effective choice in seafood certification.

- Similar to other wild-capture seafood certification programs, Alaska RFM provides credible standards for sustainable or responsible fishing and supply chain traceability.

- Alaska RFM has two certification standards:

  1) Fisheries Standard
  2) Chain of Custody Standard (CoC)

- Fisheries are independently assessed and scored against a set of criteria, and must meet these criteria in order to become certified. Certification is valid for five years with annual surveillance audits.

- Organizations in the supply chain must undergo a CoC audit to receive their CoC certification, which is valid for three years with annual surveillance audits.

- RFM allows companies to demonstrate responsible sourcing to their customers. This is important; as today's retailers and foodservice operators need to be sure they offer their customers seafood from fisheries that are certified through credible certification programs.

Companies can highlight the following attributes when selling Certified Sustainable Alaska RFM seafood:

- Based on internationally recognized criteria from the United Nation's FAO
- Consumer-facing eco-label – Certified Sustainable Alaska RFM seal has **zero logo-licensing fees!**
- Certified Sustainable Alaska RFM seal allows companies to highlight certified sustainable seafood and preserve the Alaska Origin
- Third-party accredited program provides impartiality
- Sound governance structure
- Stakeholder engagement
- Chain of Custody certification provides traceability through the supply chain back to its origin
- Transparent and collaborative assessment process
- Recognized by credible organizations – 1st to be recognized by GSSI

Bottom-line – buying seafood from Alaska RFM certified fisheries provides documented third-party assurance of responsible seafood sourcing practices.

Alaska RFM Certification Program FAQs

1. What is the Alaska RFM Certification Program?

The Alaska RFM Certification Program is a voluntary and internationally accredited certification assessment of whether an Alaska fishery is responsibly managed based on strict criteria. It consists of two seafood certification standards: 1) Fisheries Standard and 2) Chain of Custody Standard.

Alaska RFM is a comprehensive program founded on the strongest and most widely acknowledged international standards and practices. Based on United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) criteria, it is one of the few programs to have an accredited certification process under the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 17065) code.

2. Why was Alaska RFM developed?

The Alaska RFM Program was developed and adopted in 2010 as a result of market requests and a desire to have a credible choice in certification programs.

Fisheries certification is now a requirement to sell into most marketplaces. Our customers and industry felt that having a choice in certification was important. The goal was to create a cost effective, credible certification alternative that was:

- Independent, third-party and formally accredited;
- Directly based on the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Management;
- Preserves/highlights the Alaska origin;
- Cost effective for the supply chain; and
- Provides a consumer facing eco-label without logo licensing fees

** The FAO documents are available from the FAO website:*
http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/v9878e/v9878e00.HTM

3. How is Alaska RFM the same/different from other certification programs?

Alaska RFM shares some key attributes of other certification programs:

- It is a voluntary program;
- It is an independent, third-party verification;
- It has a robust set of criteria which fisheries are assessed against which consist of the following **Six Key Principles**:

  1. The Fisheries Management System
  2. Science and Stock Assessment Activities
  3. The Precautionary Approach
  4. Management Measure
  5. Implementation, Monitoring and Control
  6. Serious Impacts of the Fishery on the Ecosystem

- It offers a consumer-facing eco-label;
- It has a Chain of Custody Standard which demonstrates traceability through the supply chain for those companies who have undergone a Chain of Custody audit.

Some of the differences to other fishery certification programs are:

- No logo licensing fees;
- One of the few programs to have its certification process be accredited to ISO 17065
- Some certification programs are global; Alaska RFM is regional and only open to all fisheries within Alaska;
- RFM is verification of responsible fisheries management practices and does not interfere, nor dictate, how to manage fisheries – that is left to the competent fisheries authorities.

4. What is the value proposition of the Alaska RFM Certification Program?

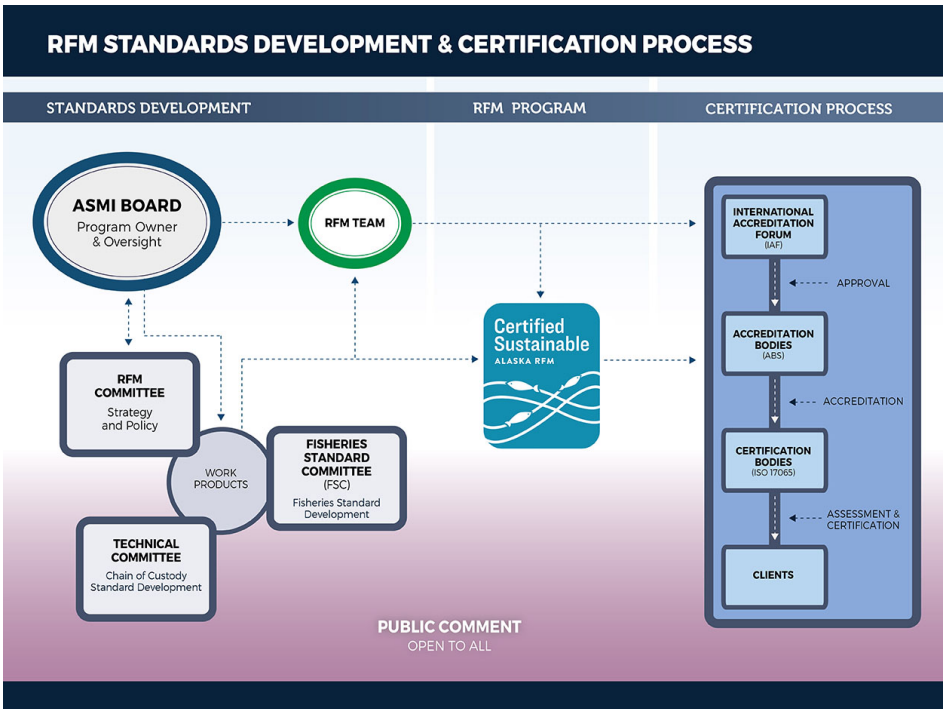
- Provides choice in the marketplace for wild-capture fishery certification; Choice drives improvements and cost-savings;
- Provides a 'Certified Seal' and there are no costly logo licensing fees;
- Cost effective, practical, and accessible to both large and small businesse**s**;
- Provides assurance to the marketplace that the fishery where their seafood was caught has been independently certified and audited to a strict set of standards;
- Independent 3rd- party verification of responsible fisheries management; and
- There are no mandatory requirements that require a fishery to be certified in order to access any markets, but this program will provide the additional reassurance to those supply chains that require some form of third-party verification.

5. What are the benefits of Alaska RFM to a customer?

- Supply Chain Companies are able to meet initiatives for a robust, independent 3rd-party certification program and demonstrate responsible sourcing to their customers;
- Customers get assurance at the highest level of market acceptance that Alaska fisheries are responsibly managed to meet the fundamental requirements of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Management;
- Those companies that want to make a product or marketing claim, must go through a rigorous Chain of Custody certification process, but **do not** have to pay for any logo licensing fees to use the recognized Certified Sustainable Alaska RFM seal; and
- The origin is included under the Certified Sustainable Alaska RFM seal, thus providing customers with a key communication tool indicating where their responsibly managed certified seafood is sourced.

6. Who owns the Alaska RFM Certification Program?

The RFM Program is owned and managed by the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI). The ASMI Board of Directors is the approving body for all standards, strategy and policy related to the Alaska RFM Program. There are three advisory committees to the ASMI Board of Directors as noted in the following chart.



The Alaska RFM Fisheries Standard Committee (FSC) is an independent expert committee which oversees the ongoing review and development of the Fisheries Standard. This committee includes national and international experts in fishery science, management, and sustainability, including eNGO representation. Current members of the FSC can be found at http://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/about-rfm/advisory-committees/.

7. When did the Alaska RFM Certification Program originate?

The Alaska RFM Certification Program has been in existence since 2010. The first fishery certified was Alaska salmon on March 11, 2011.

8. How is RFM funded?

The Program is funded by ASMI. ASMI is funded through the state and federal government, but primarily by an annual, voluntary industry assessment based on the ex-vessel value of Alaska's commercial seafood harvest. Ex-vessel value is defined as the dollar amount received by the fishermen for their catch when delivered to a processor. This includes both initial payments and any bonuses or any year-end adjustments paid by processors.

9. Has RFM been benchmarked?

Alaska RFM was the first certification program to achieve recognition by the **Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative's (GSSI) Global Benchmark Tool.**

GSSI publicly recognizes seafood certification schemes that meet the GSSI Essential Components grounded in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the FAO Guidelines for Seafood

Certification and Ecolabelling. Through Supplementary Components GSSI's Tool also outlines the status of existing practices in seafood certification. This helps to make purchasing decisions more efficient by offering greater choice in seafood certification and driving down costs, while promoting environmental sustainability.

To access the Alaska RFM Benchmark Report go to:
https://www.ourgssi.org/gssi-recognized-certifcation/

10. Why does it matter that Alaska RFM has GSSI recognition?

One way businesses provide assurance to their customers is the use of seafood certification schemes for both aquaculture production and wild capture fisheries. However, the increase in the number of programs and ecolabels has led to confusion among producers, retailers and consumers over how to recognize a credible seafood certification scheme.

The GSSI Benchmark Tool is an attempt to streamline procurement decisions by making it easy for buyers to see which certification programs have met the rigorous bar set forth by FAO's internationally agreed guidelines.

For the first time, members of the seafood supply chain, NGOs, governmental and intergovernmental organizations and a number of independent scientists have come up with a collective, non-competitive approach to provide clarity on seafood certification and ensure confidence in certified seafood.

This shared solution will make information available across the seafood supply chain to drive change and lower costs:

- **For producers**, it means more options to choose the scheme that is right for them and reduce the need for multiple audits.

- **For seafood buyers**, it means simpler, more consistent data to guide their purchasing decisions.

- **For NGOs**, it means more open and verified information to help promote environmental sustainability.

- **For Alaska RFM**, it means being publicly recognized for meeting all applicable GSSI Essential Components, a globally agreed benchmark building confidence in seafood certification. For more information on GSSI go to https://www.ourgssi.org/

11. Which fisheries are Alaska RFM Certified?

https://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/certified-fisheries/

Alaska RFM Certified Species/Fisheries

FISH SPECIES	GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF FISHERY	GEAR TYPE
PACIFIC SALMON SPECIES Client: Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (King/Chinook, Sockeye/Red, Coho/Silver, Keta/Chum, Pink)	Region 1: Southeast & Yakutat Region 2: Central Region 3: Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Region 4: Kodiak, Chignik, Alaska Peninsula, Aleutian Islands	Troll, Purse Seine, Drift Gillnet, Set Gillnet Purse Seine, Drift Gillnet, Set Gillnet Drift Gillnet, Set Gillnet, Fish Wheel Purse Seine, Drift Gillnet, Set Gillnet
PACIFIC HALIBUT Client: Fishing Vessels Owners Association (Eat on the Wild Side)	Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands	Benthic Longline
SABLEFISH (BLACK COD) Client: Fishing Vessels Owners Association (Eat on the Wild Side)	Federal and State fisheries Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands	Benthic Longline, Pot, Non-pelagic Trawl
ALASKA (WALLEYE) POLLOCK Client: Alaska Pollock Fishery Group (Pacific Seafood Processors Association, At-Sea Processors Association, Alaska Groundfish Data Bank)	Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands	Pelagic Trawl, and other gears (Non-pelagic Trawl, Jig, Longline, Pot) from other non-directed pollock fisheries legally landing pollock
PACIFIC COD Client: Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation	Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands	Non-pelagic Trawl, Longline, Pot, Jig
FLATFISH COMPLEX Client: Alaska Seafood Cooperative • Yellowfin sole • Flathead sole • Northern rock sole • Southern rock sole • Arrowtooth flounder • Kamchatka flounder • Alaska plaice • Greenland turbot • Rex sole	 Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska Gulf of Alaska; Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Bering Sea & Aleutian Islands Gulf of Alaska	 Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl Non-pelagic Trawl, Longline Non-pelagic Trawl
CRAB Client: Bering Sea Crab Client Group LLC • Red King crab • Snow crab • Blue King crab • Golden King crab	 Bristol Bay Eastern Bering Sea & Bristol Bay St. Matthew Island Aleutian Islands	 Pot Pot Pot Pot

For fisheries assessments go to https://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/certified-fisheries/

12. Who are the fishery clients and what is their role?

RFM is voluntary program. If a fishery is interested in being certified they need to be represented by a client or client group. Below are the current clients for the Alaska RFM certified fisheries.

ALASKA FISHERY CLIENTS	SALMON	HALIBUT	BLACK COD/ SABLEFISH	POLLOCK	CRAB	COD	FLATFISH
Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, Inc. http://www.afdf.org/about/	✓					✓	
Fishing Vessels Owners Association/ Eat on the Wild Side http://fvoa.org/about-us/		✓	✓				
Alaska Pollock Fishery Client Group (Pacific Seafood Processors Association http://www.pspafish.net, At-Sea Processors Association http://www.atsea.org and the Alaska Groundfish Data Bank)				✓			
Bering Sea Crab Client Group LLC					✓		
Alaska Seafood Cooperative http://www.alaskaseafoodcooperative.org							✓

https://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/certified-companies/

13. During the assessment process, what are the key areas fisheries are evaluated against?

The Alaska RFM Fisheries Standard focuses on **6 Key Principles** for evaluating fisheries:

1. The Fisheries Management System
2. Science and Stock Assessment Activities
3. The Precautionary Approach
4. Management Measure
5. Implementation, Monitoring and Control
6. Serious Impacts of the Fishery on the Ecosystem

The scope of the Alaska RFM Fisheries Standard and Program is:

"Responsible Fisheries Management, including enhancement practices (but excluding full cycle aquaculture), up to the point of landing, with the main objective being the biological sustainability of the "stock under consideration," with consideration for conservation, biodiversity and ecosystem integrity, and due regard to social responsibility and the economic viability of the fishery."

14. What is the length of a Fishery Certification Certificate and how often are the audits?

Once a fishery is certified to the Alaska RFM Fisheries Standard the certificate lasts five years. Each certified fishery enters annual surveillance audits for continuing certification. Re-certification occurs

after a period of five years. For information on the assessment process go to http://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/about-rfm/how-it-works/

15. How was the Alaska RFM Fisheries Standard developed?

In 2010 ASMI put out an RFP to develop a standards framework and certification system. This work entailed taking the FAO key reference documents and creating 'auditable criteria' against which an independent Certification Body could assess an Alaska fishery.

The RFM Standards were created by an independent group of experts composing the Alaska Conformance Criteria Committee *(now known as the Fisheries Standard Committee)*.

Two standards were developed:

1. Alaska Responsible Fisheries Management Conformance Criteria *(now known as the Alaska Responsible Fisheries Management Standard)* and;
2. Alaska RFM Chain of Custody Standard.

The scope of the standards includes any Alaska fishery, any fish species, all production systems/gear types, geographical locations, and company structures (single units, groupings of sites/boats, small-scale fisheries, subcontractors, product categories, packers, processors, storage and distribution).

The historic and present Fisheries Standard Committee (FSC) (formerly the Conformance Criteria Committee) members are listed on the ASMI website. Members are volunteers and are not paid for their time or effort in developing the Alaska RFM Fisheries Standard.

16. Who developed the Alaska RFM Fisheries Standard?

CONFORMANCE CRITERIA COMMITTEE AND ADVISORS (2011/2012):

Ciaran Kelly	Marine Institute, Galway
Steve Grabacki	Independent Fishery Consultant, Alaska
Eric Dunne	Independent Fishery Consultant, Canada
Deidre Hoare	Independent Fishery Consultant, Ireland
Dankert Skagen	Independent Fishery Consultant, Nordic
George Rose	Municipal University, Canada
Earl Krieger	Independent Fishery Consultant, Alaska
Bob Alain	Independent Fishery Consultant, Canada
Norman Graham	Marine Institute, Ireland North Atlantic
Bill Smoker	Independent Fishery Consultant, US / Pacific
John Caddy	Independent Fishery Consultant, Ex FAO
Ted Loveday	Independent Fishery Consultant, Australia

OVERSIGHT BOARD (2011/2012):

Chair – Mr. Dermott Jewell	CEO Consumer Association
Dr. Grimur Valdimarrson	Ex FAO Fisheries Director
Dr. Andrew Jackson	Independent Fishery Consultant, Canada
Dr. Donal Maguire	Executive – Irish Fisheries Board
Mr. Gerry McCurdy	Director – Food Standards Authority
Mr. Richie Flynn	Farmers Association
Mr. Peter Marshall	CEO GTC, Secretariat (Non-Voting)

17. Is there a multi-stakeholder process for the Standard Development and Fishery Assessment process?

STAKEHOLDER INPUT APPLICABLE TO THE STANDARD OWNER
Comments related to RFM Standards or RFM Program Management go to the Standard owner, ASMI, by submitting online in the Comments, Appeals and Complaints section of the ASMI website. ASMI has planned official public comment periods for the Standards; however Stakeholders are welcome to submit information to ASMI at any time about the Standard or Program Management. The information will be reviewed for eligibility and forwarded to relevant parties.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT APPLICABLE TO THE CERTIFICATION BODY
Comments regarding fishery certification, re-certification, annual surveillance audits or a specific fishery go directly to the relevant Certification Body (CB). Interested stakeholders can register for comment with the appropriate CB – please refer to the individual fishery assessment notifications and certification reports to identify the CB. http://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/certified-fisheries/

Comments and information relevant to Standards received outside of official Public Comment periods will be held by ASMI until the Standards review activity commences. For more information on the stakeholder process go to http://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/stakeholder-involvement/

18. How often is the RFM Program reviewed and updated?

The RFM program policies and procedures are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure their relevance and to verify that they continue to meet the demands of the global marketplace. The reviews include: findings, cause analysis, preventive and corrective actions with deadlines and responsibilities, as applicable. The resulting corrective actions could instigate a revision of the relevant operating policies and procedures, as applicable, with specified time frames.

ASMI ensures that this management review is fully documented, is carried out with the involvement of interested parties and directly affected stakeholders, and addresses any relevant issues of concern raised by stakeholders. These could be raised via comments submitted directly to ASMI through the available comments submission tool in ASMI's website or during the open public comment periods.

19. How often is the Fishery Standard reviewed and updated?

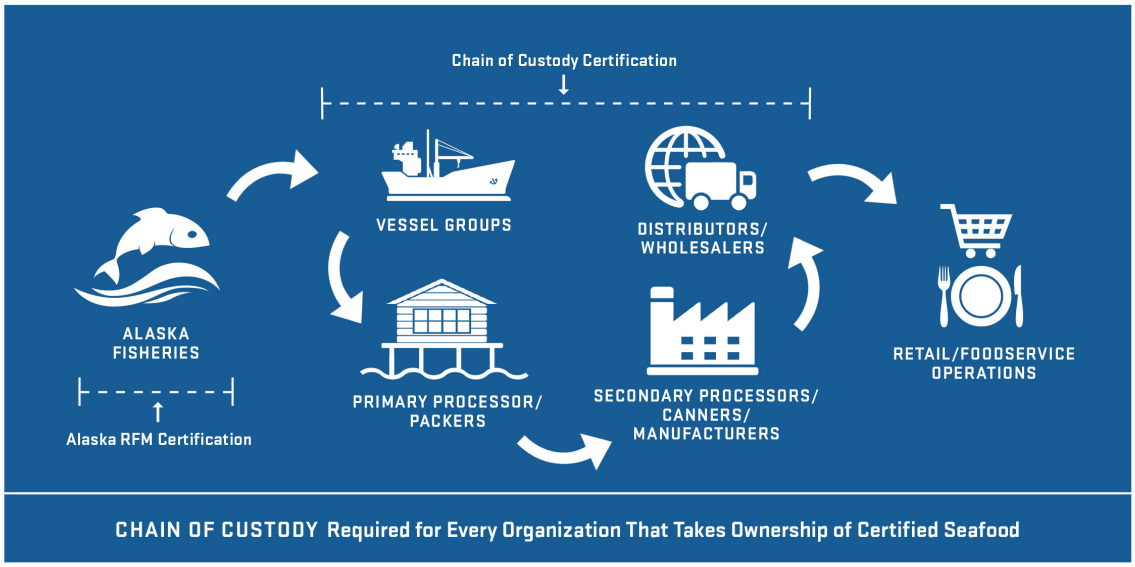
The RFM Standards are reviewed annually as a matter of process and procedure. At a minimum, there will be a full review and/or reissue every five years.

20. Why should a company go through Chain of Custody Certification?

Companies that have Chain of Custody certification can make certification claims on their products, POS materials and/or website. It gives confidence to all buyers of the seafood that it can be traced back through the supply chain to the fishery that was certified as part of the Alaska Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) Program.

If a company buys seafood from a certified fishery and wishes to make the certified claim or uses the RFM seal, Chain of Custody certification is required. Every organization that takes ownership of the certified seafood, from the point of first handling after the seafood has been landed, until it is processed into the final consumer product, will need to be certified to the Chain of Custody Standard.

Steps for Using RFM Seal and/or Certification Claim



21. What is the cost for Chain of Custody?

Global Trust/SAI Global and SCS Global Services are the ASMI approved CBs who perform Chain of Custody audits for the Alaska RFM Program. Each CB can be contacted for a price quote go to: http://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/chain-of-custody/coc-certification-bodies/

22. What is the length of the Chain of Custody Certificate?

Certificates are valid for three years with annual surveillance. On-going certification is maintained where there is substantive and demonstrable evidence that the applicant remains in compliance with the criteria of the Standard.

23. Can a company use the same Certification Body for RFM and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Chain of Custody audits?

Yes, if your current MSC Chain of Custody audit is performed by either of the two ASMI approved CBs (Global Trust/SAI Global or SCS Global Services).

24. Where can I find a list of Alaska RFM Certified Companies?

Go to http://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/certified-companies/

25. How do I sign up for Chain of Custody?

The first step is to complete an application with one of the ASMI approved CBs. Go to http://www.alaskaseafood.org/rfm-certification/chain-of-custody/application/

26. What is the cost to use the Certified Sustainable Alaska RFM Seal?

Using the Certified Sustainable Alaska RFM seal is free once a Terms of Use Agreement is signed. There are no logo licensing fees. Companies that go through the RFM Chain of Custody process incur a cost for the audit which is paid directly to the CBs. However, ASMI ensures all participants have free access to the seal.

27. How can a company demonstrate to consumers that a product is RFM certified?

The RFM program has a Certified Seal that can be displayed on pack, or on a company's website. This seal is used in conjunction with a company's CoC number to signify that that the product comes from an Alaska RFM certified fishery. To use the seal a company must sign a Terms of Use Agreement and then the seal is free to use.

28. Are there fisheries from outside Alaska using the RFM Certification model?

ASMI chose a model based on the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Management and the FAO Ecolabeling Guidelines because it is internationally recognized as a model of excellence for seafood certification practices. Other US states, such as Louisiana, and countries such as Japan and Iceland also use these FAO Code and Guidelines for their certification programs, and this model is under consideration for use in other countries.