

BENCHMARK HOLDINGS, LLC

COMPLAINT AND DISPUTE PROCESS DESCRIPTION

Benchmark Holdings, LLC, representing Benchmark International, LLC and Benchmark Consulting and Inspection, LLC (collectively referred to as “Benchmark”) is committed to receiving, reviewing, and resolving customer feedback, both positive and negative, in a fair, timely, and impartial manner.

This process is available to Benchmark clients and other interested stakeholders who wish to submit feedback, including a complaint or dispute, regarding Benchmark’s services or regarding a Benchmark-certified client. This process does not apply to appeals of prior complaint or dispute decisions. Appeals are handled under Benchmark’s separate Appeals Process (OP-002).

1. How to Submit a Complaint or Dispute:

You may submit a complaint or dispute to Benchmark using any one of the following ways:

- Contacting any Benchmark representative by phone or by email;
- Contacting our office by phone at +1 (541) 484-9212;
- Submitting an Inquiry Form using the Benchmark website at <https://benchmark-intl.com/contact/>, or;
- Sending an email to info@benchmark-intl.com.

To help Benchmark review your complaint or dispute efficiently, please provide as much relevant information as possible, including:

- Your name and contact information;
- The company or organization involved, if applicable;
- A clear description of the concern;
- Whether the matter relates to Benchmark services, a Benchmark certification or inspection decision, laboratory testing, or a Benchmark-certified client;
- Any documents, records, correspondence, photographs, or other information that support your concern;
- The outcome or resolution you are seeking, if applicable.

Benchmark does not respond to anonymous complaints or disputes. A complaint or dispute must include enough information for Benchmark to understand the matter and follow up with the person or organization submitting it.

1.1. What Is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, other than a dispute or appeal, where a response is expected. A complaint may relate to Benchmark’s activities, the quality of Benchmark products or services, or a Benchmark certified client.

Examples may include concerns about Benchmark’s service quality, personnel conduct, communication, a possible system failure, or an alleged issue involving a Benchmark-certified client.

1.2. What Is a Dispute?

A dispute is a difference in interpretation of an inspection, test, or certification requirement that requires formal review. A dispute may involve a nonconformity, a conformance decision from a third-party inspection, a test result, or a certification decision, including rejection of an application, suspension, termination, or reduction in scope of certification.

2. What Benchmark Does After Receiving Your Submission:

After receiving a complaint or dispute, Benchmark will document the matter and forward it to the Quality Manager for review. Benchmark will first determine whether the submission contains enough information to be evaluated and whether it appears to be within the scope of this process.

If essential information is missing, Benchmark may request additional information before continuing the review.

3. Acknowledgment and Timeframes:

Benchmark will acknowledge receipt of a complaint or dispute in writing as soon as possible, and no later than ten (10) business days after receiving it. If you do not receive written acknowledgement from Benchmark within 10 business days, please call our offices directly at +1 (541) 484-9212 to verify we received the information.

Benchmark will also provide a brief explanation of the follow-up process and expected timeframes.

Benchmark aims to provide formal communication of the investigation findings and resolution, when applicable, within thirty (30) business days after the complaint or dispute is submitted. Some matters may require more time because of their nature or scope. When additional time is needed, Benchmark will provide periodic status updates.

4. Investigation and Resolution:

Benchmark assigns complaints and disputes to qualified personnel for investigation and resolution. Personnel who were directly involved in the original inspection, test, certification decision, or related activity that is the subject of the complaint or dispute will not be assigned to investigate that matter.

For certification-related complaints or disputes, Benchmark will also avoid using personnel who provided consultancy to, or were employed by, the relevant client within the prior two (2) years. If Benchmark cannot assign an impartial reviewer internally, the matter may be referred to Benchmark's Impartiality Committee for processing.

Assigned personnel will gather and verify the information needed to evaluate the complaint or dispute, to the extent possible. The review may include evaluating documents, communications, applicable requirements, certification or inspection records, service records, and any other relevant information.

Where correction or corrective action is needed, Benchmark will determine appropriate action based on the nature and scope of the matter. Actions may include correction of a specific issue, corrective or preventive action, or other steps needed to address the concern.

Benchmark is responsible for all decisions made at each level of the complaint and dispute handling process.

Submitting a complaint or dispute will not result in discriminatory action against the person or organization submitting it.

5. Complaints Involving Benchmark Clients:

Benchmark may also receive complaints from third parties involving an alleged breach of one or more product certification, third-party inspection, or laboratory test standards by a Benchmark client.

When a complaint involves a Benchmark client, Benchmark will review the information provided and may request additional written information from the complainant. Benchmark may also forward relevant information to the client involved and request a written response.

Information received from a third party about a Benchmark client will be treated as confidential. Benchmark will disclose information to the client only as needed for Benchmark or the client to respond to the complaint, regulatory matter, or other applicable activity. Benchmark will not disclose the identity of the source of confidential information to the client unless the source agrees in writing in advance.

If the client does not respond within thirty (30) business days, or if Benchmark determines that the client may have violated applicable agreements or requirements, Benchmark will determine the appropriate next step. For a certified client, this may include actions taken as specified in Benchmark's certification procedures, including possible suspension or termination of certification where applicable.

In some cases, Benchmark may review the matter during a surveillance audit or determine that an unannounced or short-notice audit is needed. If such an audit is required to investigate or close the complaint, Benchmark's internal procedure calls for it to be completed within ninety (90) business days from receipt of the complaint.

Because Benchmark has confidentiality obligations to its clients, Benchmark may not be able to provide the complainant with detailed investigation findings or client-specific information. Benchmark will, however, strive to provide an appropriate written response to the complainant regarding its decision on the matter.

6. Written Decision:

Benchmark will notify the complainant and/or the affected Benchmark client, as applicable, in writing of the decision on the matter.

For disputes and for complaints involving Benchmark-certified clients, the written response will also advise the relevant party that the decision may be appealed under Benchmark's Appeals Process (OP-002).

7. Appeal Rights:

If you disagree with Benchmark's decision on a complaint or dispute, you may be able to appeal the decision under Benchmark's Appeals Process (OP-002).

For matters involving Benchmark's conformance to applicable accreditation criteria under ISO/IEC 17065, ISO/IEC 17025, ISO/IEC 17020, or JAS Law No. 175, the relevant Benchmark Accreditation Body is the final level of appeal. Benchmark will abide by decisions made by the relevant Accreditation Body as they relate to Benchmark's conformance with applicable accreditation criteria.

8. Referral of Unresolved Matters:

With appropriate internal approval, Benchmark may refer complaints or disputes that cannot be adequately resolved to an independent arbitrator or to the appropriate accreditation body. This may apply to complaints or disputes about Benchmark products and services as well as complaints involving Benchmark-certified clients.

9. Questions About This Process:

Questions about submitting a complaint or dispute may be directed to Benchmark by calling our offices at +1 (541) 484-9212, by submitting an Inquiry Form using the Benchmark website at <https://benchmark-intl.com/contact/>, or by sending an email to info@benchmark-intl.com.