

Note: Certification to the BIFMA e3 Sustainability Standard was initially verified by SCS and called Sustainable Choice™. BIFMA has changed the name of the certification to level™, and Allsteel systems furniture is level-2 certified (by SCS). The following information was developed before the name change.

Sustainability and Office Furniture FAQ

What is Sustainable Choice?

Sustainable Choice is an environmental claims verification program established by Scientific Certification Systems (SCS). Sustainable Choice certification is based on the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturer's Association (BIFMA) Sustainability Standard.

Who is SCS?

Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) is one of the oldest and most trusted names in independent certification of environmental claims. They serve as a third-party certification organization for a number of different environmental claims.

Who is BIFMA?

The Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturer's Association (BIFMA) is a non-profit organization that provides a forum for members to cooperate and collaborate on industry issues including developing standards, publishing industry statistics, advocating for legislation, and facilitating dialogue and education in the furniture industry.

What is BIFMA's Sustainability Standard?

BIFMA's Sustainability Standard is the result of a two-year project involving environmental groups, government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and members of the office furniture industry. The purpose of the standard is to provide measurable, market-based definitions of progressively more sustainable furniture by establishing performance criteria that address environmental and social aspects throughout the supply chain. It provides a common set of metrics for measuring the environmental and social aspects of office furniture and a common language for reporting performance to end users.

How does the BIFMA Sustainability Standard work?

The BIFMA Sustainability Standard establishes performance criteria in four key areas of sustainability:

1. Materials
2. Energy and Atmosphere
3. Human and Ecosystem Health
4. Social Responsibility

Each section has prerequisites, and all prerequisites must be met before the product qualifies for a performance rating. Once the prerequisites are met, a product can achieve a Silver, Gold, or Platinum rating as it meets increasingly more sustainable criteria.



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How do Sustainable Choice and the BIFMA Sustainability Standard relate?

The BIFMA Sustainability Standard used an open, consensus-based standard development process involving representatives from government agencies, academia, NGOs, and the office furniture industry. The committee spent nearly two years identifying the desirable aspects of sustainable office furniture and building a process for scoring the product. Under the Sustainable Choice program, which is separate from BIFMA, scientists and engineers from SCS conduct site audits to verify the manufacturer's systems and capabilities, and evaluate data forming the basis for credits claimed against the BIFMA Sustainability Standard. SCS then issues an independent report of their findings and certifies companies and products that make the grade as Sustainable Choice.

Why is all of this important?

The market is flooded with environmental marketing claims. Often the claims are hard to understand and difficult to link to actual product performance. The BIFMA Sustainability Standard establishes a way to compare the sustainability claims of various office furniture manufacturers using a set of criteria that go beyond LEED® and other standards that are more narrowly focused. Sustainable Choice certifies that the claims made by the manufacturer are true and consistently reliable.

Does the BIFMA Sustainability Standard require certification?

No. A manufacturer is free to self-certify their own claims. Allsteel chose independent, third-party assessment and certification (Sustainable Choice) to provide transparency and an additional level of quality assurance to clients and our marketing materials.

Is Sustainable Choice the only choice?

No. SCS currently operates FloorScore, Indoor Advantage™, and other environmental claims verification programs for building and workspace materials. Independent certification is increasingly expected by knowledgeable consumers, and other organizations are gearing up to certify to the BIFMA Sustainability Standard. Allsteel chose Sustainable Choice because SCS is one of the oldest, most trusted names in independent environmental claims verification.

Is the BIFMA Sustainability Standard an American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standard?

Not yet. The Sustainability Standard was developed under the NSF International ANSI Standard development process. The Standard has been balloted (voted on) and approved by BIFMA membership. It has been provided for public comment as part of the ANSI standard process and will be finalized in 2010.

Who is NSF?

NSF International (formerly called the National Sanitation Foundation) is a non-profit organization that develops standards and criteria that bear upon health. It serves as a neutral medium in which business and industry, official regulatory agencies, and the public come together to deal with problems regarding products, equipment, procedures, and services related to health and the environment. It was founded in 1944.



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Who is ANSI?

As the voice of the U.S. standards and conformity assessment system, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) empowers its members and constituents to strengthen the U.S. marketplace position in the global economy. The Institute, founded in 1918, oversees the creation, promulgation, and use of thousands of norms and guidelines that help to assure the safety and health of consumers and the protection of the environment. ANSI is also actively engaged in accrediting programs that assess conformance to standards, including globally recognized cross-sector programs such as the ISO 9000 (quality) and ISO 14000 (environmental) management systems.

Is the Sustainability Standard likely to change as a result of ANSI Comment?

Yes, it may. The Standard was developed through a broad-based consensus process by experienced people. It should represent the best view of the public as a whole, but there is always a possibility that greater audience review will drive improvements in the Standard.

Is there a danger in certifying to the BIFMA Standard before it becomes an official ANSI standard?

No. By nature, sustainability metrics will change as more information becomes available. The real danger is waiting until there is a perfect measure before beginning to understand and reduce environmental impacts.

Allsteel was one of the first companies to earn certification to the BIFMA Standard. How did Allsteel achieve this?

In 1947, the founders of HNI Corporation (Allsteel's parent company) mandated the social responsibility and business practices similar to those required by the BIFMA Sustainability Standard today. Allsteel's lean manufacturing philosophy and environmental management system provided the foundation for enough credits to earn Silver certification upon the finalization of the BIFMA Standard. Allsteel decided to go through the certification process now because it provides a new environmental performance benchmark for us, as providers, and you, as consumers of our products.



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