

# THE RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Our values  
and basic principles





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## **I. RAL Quality Assurance - much more than just quality**

RAL Quality Assurance provides consumers and industry with security based on a system organised under private law: You can expect to find reliable, solid and trustworthy products and services offering a consistently high level of quality under this system. RAL Quality Marks (Gütezeichen) are subject to comprehensive quality criteria. They always go above and beyond existing standards and legal regulations, which also concentrate on only one single characteristic of a product or service. In contrast, the RAL Quality Assurance System always encompasses a diverse range of aspects that are important for the use of the product or service. In particular, this includes environmental friendliness, safety, cost-effectiveness, customer orientation, durability and the expertise of personnel.

The RAL Quality Assurance system represents a far-reaching promise of quality that can cover aspects such as the provision of expert advice, subsequent support and the handling of complaints. This creates trust and security. Quality Assurance Associations (Gütegemeinschaften) see themselves as value-based communities that have set a fair and proper interaction with their customers as their goal. This is why their members submit voluntarily to the RAL Quality Assurance System. The key aspects of the RAL Quality Assurance System are described in the following sections.

## **II. RAL Quality Assurance - consumer protection, rationalisation and transparency from a single source**

RAL Quality Assurance encompasses all of the previously named aspects required for consumer protection and also helps to rationalise the economy.

Consumers benefit from the RAL Quality Assurance system because the Quality Assurance and Test Specifications encompass all significant aspects that are important for the use of products and services from a consumer's perspective. In addition, the regulations can be viewed at any time because all quality assurance regulations and, therefore, the relevant (Quality Assurance and Test Specifications) are publicly accessible. This transparency also serves to provide consumer protection. It enables every consumer to check whether a company using a RAL Quality Mark (Gütezeichen) is honouring the associated quality promise.

The special advantage for business is that those products and services issued with RAL Quality Marks (Gütezeichen) always fulfil the Quality Assurance and Test Specifications defined in the RAL Quality Assurance System. Therefore, clients and awarding authorities can dispense with complicated preliminary inspections and reviews. Furthermore, it has been shown that these quality assurance systems can reduce the number of errors made by manufacturers and suppliers. The reliability of these Quality Assurance Systems is one reason why they can be used in public invitations to tender to simplify the tendering and awarding procedures.

The RAL Quality Marks (Gütezeichen) are also published in the German Federal Gazette.



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### **III. RAL Quality Assurance - a lean system**

The RAL Quality Assurance System comprises only a few organisational levels:

- **German Institute for Quality Assurance and Certification**  
(RAL Deutsches Institut für Gütesicherung und Kennzeichnung e. V.)  
RAL is the body responsible for the system and it ensures that Quality Marks (Gütezeichen) remain reliable and trustworthy labels. This independent and neutral umbrella organisation is responsible for supporting the Quality Assurance Associations and creating new Quality Marks (Gütezeichen). RAL also protects against any misuse of the Quality Mark System and the term "Quality Mark" (Gütezeichen).
- **The Quality Assurance Associations**  
Those companies who use a particular RAL Quality Mark (RAL Gütezeichen) join together to form a Quality Assurance Association. The Quality Assurance Association is responsible for issuing the right to use the Quality Mark (Gütezeichen). It ensures that affiliated companies (users of the Quality Mark (Gütezeichen) are monitored, it protects and defends the Quality Mark (Gütezeichen) issued by them and is responsible for regular updating of the Quality Assurance and Test Specifications.
- **The users of the Quality Marks (Gütezeichen)**  
They obligate themselves to the voluntary fulfilment of the RAL Quality Assurance Regulations and subject themselves to quality monitoring.

### **IV. Trusted due to the expertise, neutrality and independence of RAL**

The prerequisite for the trustworthiness of the RAL Quality Assurance System and the different Quality Marks (Gütezeichen) is the expertise, neutrality and independence of the issuing body: RAL. The balanced composition of its Board of Trustees guarantees the neutrality of RAL. It comprises representatives from 15 leading associations within the German economy, four federal ministries and three federal agencies, as well as four members of RAL. The RAL Executive Board also includes independent experts from testing institutions, consumer groups, federal ministries and leading associations within the German economy.

The RAL Quality Assurance System has unique characteristics that fundamentally differentiate it from all other labelling systems. RAL ensures the objectivity and neutrality of the Quality Assurance and Test Specifications, while the Quality Assurance Associations ensure strict adherence with these regulations. This is a significant reason why consumers, business and the public sector are in safe hands when they use RAL Quality Marks (Gütezeichen) to guide them.



## **V. Reliability due to monitoring by independent bodies**

### **a) Tested statutes and Quality Mark (Gütezeichen) documentation**

Every quality assurance scheme is backed up by the statutes of the Quality Assurance Association, which cover all significant legal aspects. The relevant Quality Assurance Association responsible for the Quality Mark (Gütezeichen) must ensure strict observance with the criteria for quality assurance recognised by RAL and laid down in the statutes and Quality Mark (Gütezeichen) documentation. It represents the Quality Assurance System in a competitive environment.

The Quality Assurance Associations are obligated to regularly report back to RAL about the monitoring of the users of the Quality Marks (Gütezeichen) and those third party testers commissioned to carry out the inspections.

### **b) Manufacturer-independent and objective approval process**

The RAL Quality Assurance System ensures that the Quality Assurance and Test Specifications are independent of the interests of individual manufacturers and defined in an objective, publicly accessible process. RAL integrates institutions like state and federal authorities, relevant associations, consumer groups and also testing institutions in the consultation process. Therefore, the RAL quality assurance system excludes the possibility that the Quality Assurance and Test Specifications reflect the interests of individual market participants. Furthermore, they ensure that the regulations take into account the legal situation in a competitive, monopoly, association and brand sense, which protects entrepreneurial freedom as a result.

All RAL Quality Assurance Schemes are subject to the Quality Mark (Gütezeichen) System that holds a unique position in the world of labelling. The key aspects of the RAL Quality Assurance schemes are anchored in the Guidelines for Quality Marks (Gütezeichen).

### **c) Quality Committees within the Quality Assurance Associations**

Every Quality Assurance Association forms a Quality Committee that, alongside qualified experts, can include representatives from associations, tender issuing bodies and consumer groups. This guarantees the neutrality and independence of the RAL Quality Assurance System.

The Quality Committees hold a key position in the RAL Quality Assurance System. They ensure that adherence with the Quality Assurance and Test Specifications is regularly monitored and suggest sanctions for infringements against the regulations to the Executive Board. They commission independent testers to monitor adherence with the quality assurance regulations by users of the Quality Marks (Gütezeichen) and then evaluate the test reports. In addition, they are the key organ within the Quality Assurance Association responsible for defining and updating the relevant RAL



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Quality Assurance Regulations. The Quality Committees regularly inform RAL about which testing institutions or testers have been commissioned to carrying out the independent monitoring.

#### **d) Monitoring by independent bodies and sanctioning users of quality marks**

The users of Quality Marks (Gütezeichen) voluntarily subject themselves to the relevant Quality Assurance Regulations. In particular, this includes the monitoring of those products and services for which they intend to use the RAL Quality Mark (RAL Gütezeichen). Therefore, this monitoring process stands at the very centre of the RAL Quality Assurance System and consists of:

- an independent initial testing process
- constant self-monitoring
- regular neutral, independent monitoring

Neutral and expert testers or testing institutions are commissioned by the Quality Assurance Associations with the task of carrying out the initial testing process and the independent monitoring. If the initial testing process or an inspection has not been successfully passed then sanctions are imposed that can include the refusal to award the Quality Mark (Gütezeichen) or the withdrawal of the Quality Mark (Gütezeichen). Once the initial testing process has been passed then the RAL Quality Mark (Gütezeichen) is issued. It is exclusively issued by the relevant Quality Assurance Association responsible for the Quality Mark (Gütezeichen).

#### **VI. Conformity assessments and quality management (QM system) – not tasks of RAL Quality Assurance**

RAL Quality Assurance schemes do not represent conformity assessments and cannot be used as substitutes for these assessments because they must always verify much more than just conformity. They are also not comparable with quality management systems (QM). While QM systems merely incorporate process descriptions and optimisations, RAL Quality Assurance schemes promote the overall quality of products and services. Therefore, QM systems are not tasks covered by RAL Quality Assurance schemes.

Notifications, accreditations and certifications are also not part of the RAL Quality Assurance System. RAL Quality Assurance schemes are independent, self-contained schemes organised under private law that demonstrate the quality of products and services through the use of RAL Quality Marks (RAL Gütezeichen).

Verifications and processes like notifications, accreditations and certifications or QM systems primarily operate in the area of conformity assessments. They were created in order to increase trust in products across Europe. In particular, this was to be achieved through the introduction of uniform, Europe-wide evaluation schemes for conformity assessments. This primarily affects all those products that demand strict requirements for the protection of public interests like general health and safety, health and safety in the workplace or consumer and environmental protection. Con-



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formity assessment bodies monitor the system. This monitoring is based on the DIN EN ISO/IEC standards. They ensure the comparability of the conformity assessment bodies.

In Germany, the task of accreditation is carried out by the German Accreditation Body (DAkkS). They act as the central contact point for all questions on this topic. State accreditation is applied everywhere where uniform approval is required e.g. to implement fundamental European standards. One example of conformity assessment for implementing harmonised European policy is the CE marking ("free trade sign"), which acts as a key for opening up borders.

## **VII. Links between RAL Quality Assurance and other systems**

RAL Quality Assurance schemes exhibit natural and in part desired or required links with other labelling, management and testing systems. Therefore, a significant number of RAL Quality Assurance schemes focus on areas affected by these regulations dealing with building, waste, soil conservation, road traffic and/or hazardous material law. They sometimes fulfil tasks that have been transferred to the relevant Quality Assurance Association responsible for the Quality Mark (Gütezeichen) by legislators and regulatory authorities. As a consequence, legally stipulated components are also incorporated into the statutes. This means, for example, that audited QM systems can be used in RAL Quality Assurance schemes as a method of self-monitoring.

Furthermore, it may be a legal requirement that the independent tester or testing institution commissioned with the task of carrying out the third party monitoring by the Quality Assurance Association must be accredited. However, this does not mean that these adapted systems hold a position of equal importance alongside the quality assurance scheme: they merely fulfil an additional task. Thus, RAL Quality Assurance schemes also do not represent conformity with statutory requirements in this sense.

## **IX. Conclusion**

RAL Quality Assurance schemes are not inconsistent with national and European efforts to define uniform, minimum standards and create standardised conformity assessment systems for them. RAL Quality Assurance schemes represent more than just conformity with standards or statutory requirements. The RAL Quality Assurance System encompasses products and services with a diverse range of characteristics that go above and beyond a basic verification of conformity.

Notifications, accreditations, certifications and QM systems are not part of RAL Quality Assurance schemes. The RAL Quality Assurance System is an intentionally independent, self-contained system organised under private law that effectively demonstrates the quality of products and services using RAL Quality Marks (RAL Gütezeichen).



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The trust placed in RAL Quality Assurance schemes is based on a number of different pillars: the neutrality, expertise and independence of RAL, those people involved in the creation of the RAL quality Assurance scheme and the comprehensive, neutral monitoring system to which all of those participating in the quality assurance scheme are subjected. Therefore, RAL Quality Assurance Associations do not require any accreditation to fulfil their role within the RAL Quality Assurance System under private law.