

# THE RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM







Reliability, neutrality, trustworthiness and up-to-date criteria: These are the characteristics that consumers and companies expect from a label. What is called for is reliable guidance against the background of a constantly growing range of goods and services.

**RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)** fully meet these requirements.

This distinguishes **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)** from all other labelling: how **RAL DEUTSCHES INSTITUT FÜR GÜTESICHERUNG UND KENNZEICHNUNG E. V.** defines the criteria for the award of the labels in harmony with other neutral institutions, how compliance with the criteria is strictly monitored and how these criteria are constantly updated in line with technological advances and the development of the market.

**RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)** are developed and approved on the basis of the **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM**, which was established back in 1925. While you would mainly come across this label in the construction industry in the early days, it now acts as a guide for particularly high-grade, quality-assured products and services in almost all areas of life.

Companies whose products or services carry a **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)** view themselves as a member of a community of values. Customer orientation and fair business conditions play a key role for them. This is because the concept of quality as embodied by RAL means much more than just high quality. It covers all aspects that are important for the use of a product or service. This also includes, for example, cost-effectiveness, environmental friendliness or the competence of personnel.

Over the next few pages, you will learn more about the unique nature of the **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM** and why **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)** are a reliable and secure choice both for consumers and companies.

Pleasant reading!

**Rüdiger Wollmann**  
Chief Executive

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# RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE – MUCH MORE THAN JUST HIGH QUALITY

The **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM** provides consumers and industry, especially public and private clients, with security based on a system organised under private law: You can expect reliable, solid and trustworthy products and services offering a consistently high level of quality from this labelling system. **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)** are subject to comprehensive quality criteria. These criteria always go above and beyond existing standards and legal regulations, which also only concentrate on 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 cost-effectiveness, reliability, environmental friendliness, safety, customer orientation, durability and competent 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 see themselves as value-based communities that have set fair and proper interaction with their customers as their goal. This is why their members submit voluntarily to the relevant **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME**. The key aspects of **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE** are described in the following sections.

## CONSUMER PROTECTION, RATIONALISATION AND TRANSPARENCY FROM A SINGLE SOURCE

**RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES** encompass all of the aspects described above, promote consumer protection and also help to rationalise the economy.

Consumers benefit from the **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES** 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 specifications can be viewed at all times because all quality assurance schemes and thus the corresponding Quality Assurance and Test Specifications are freely accessible in the public domain. This transparency also serves to provide consumer protection. It enables every consumer to check whether a company using a **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)** is honouring the associated quality promise.

The **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)** are also published in the German Federal Gazette.

The special advantage for business is that those products and services issued with **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)** always fulfil the Quality Assurance and Test Specifications defined in the **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES**. Clients can thus avoid elaborate preliminary examinations and review processes. Furthermore, the quality assurance schemes can reduce error rates for manufacturers and suppliers. The reliability of the quality assurance schemes is one reason why they are used in public invitations to tender to simplify the tendering and awarding processes.

# RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE – A LEAN SYSTEM

The RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM comprises just a few organisational levels:

- **RAL DEUTSCHES INSTITUT FÜR GÜTESICHERUNG UND KENNZEICHNUNG E. V.**

RAL is the bearer of the system and ensures that quality marks remain reliable and trustworthy labels. This independent and neutral umbrella organisation is responsible for supporting the Quality Assurance Associations. RAL also protects against any misuse of the quality assurance system and the term “Quality Marks” and is responsible for creating new quality marks.

- **THE QUALITY ASSURANCE ASSOCIATIONS**

Those companies that use a particular RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS) join together to form a Quality Assurance Association. The Quality Assurance Association is responsible for awarding the quality mark. It ensures that the affiliated companies (quality mark holders) are monitored, it protects and defends the quality mark awarded to them and is responsible for regularly updating the Quality Assurance and Test Specifications.

- **THE RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS) HOLDERS**

The quality mark holders voluntarily obligate themselves to comply with the RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME and subject themselves to quality monitoring.

## TRUSTED DUE TO THE EXPERTISE, NEUTRALITY AND INDEPENDENCE OF RAL

The prerequisite for the trustworthiness of **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE** and the different quality marks 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, three federal agencies and 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** contains unique features that differentiate it fundamentally 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 compliance with these regulations.

This is an important reason why consumers, businesses and the public sector are in safe hands when they use **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)** to guide them.



# RELIABILITY DUE TO MONITORING BY INDEPENDENT BODIES

## **TESTED STATUTES AND QUALITY MARK DOCUMENTATION**

Every **RAL 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 must ensure strict compliance with the quality assurance criteria recognised by **RAL** and laid down in the statutes and quality mark documentation. It represents the quality assurance scheme in a competitive environment.

The Quality Assurance Associations are obligated to regularly report to **RAL** on the monitoring of the quality mark holders and those third party testers commissioned to carry out the inspections.

## **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 such as state and federal authorities, relevant associations, consumer groups and also testing institutions into the consultation process. As a result, the **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES** exclude the possibility that the Quality Assurance and Test Specifications reflect the interests of individual market participants. Furthermore, they ensure that the regulations take applicable competition, cartel and association law into account and thus protect entrepreneurial freedom as a result.

All **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES** are subject to the quality mark system that holds a unique position in the world of labelling. The key rules of this system are anchored in the Guidelines for Quality Marks.

## **THE QUALITY COMMITTEES WITHIN THE QUALITY ASSURANCE ASSOCIATIONS**

Every Quality Assurance Association forms a Quality Committee which, alongside qualified experts, can also include representatives from associations, tender issuing bodies and consumer groups. This guarantees the neutrality and independence of the **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES**.

The Quality Committees hold a key position in the **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM**. They ensure that compliance 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 compliance with the quality assurance regulations by the quality mark holders and then evaluate the test reports. In addition, they are the key body within the Quality Assurance Association responsible for defining and updating the relevant **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME**. The Quality Committees regularly inform **RAL** about which testing institutions or testers have been commissioned to carry out the independent monitoring.

## **MONITORING BY INDEPENDENT BODIES AND SANCTIONING THE QUALITY MARK HOLDERS**

The quality mark holders voluntarily subject themselves to the relevant quality assurance scheme. In particular, this includes the monitoring of those products and services for which they intend to use the **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)**. This monitoring process thus 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 to carry out the initial testing process and the independent monitoring. If quality mark holders fail the initial testing process or an inspection, sanctions are imposed that can include the refusal to award the label or the withdrawal of the **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)**. Once the initial testing process has been passed, the **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)** is awarded. It is exclusively awarded by the relevant Quality Assurance Association responsible for the quality mark.

## DIFFERENCE FROM OTHER SYSTEMS

Notifications, accreditations and certifications are not part of the **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM**. Verifications and processes such as notifications, accreditations and certifications, as well as QM systems, primarily operate in the area of conformity assessments. They were created in order to increase trust in products across Europe.

In particular, the aim was to promote trust by introducing uniform, Europe-wide evaluation schemes for conformity assessments. This primarily affects all those products that must meet strict requirements for the protection of public interests like general health and safety, health and safety in the workplace or consumer and environmental protection. Conformity 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.

**RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES** are not conformity assessments in the sense of the European concept of harmonisation, whereby products are assessed based on uniform, transnational standards. It is also not possible to use them as a substitute for these conformity assessments.

**RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES** must always verify compliance with an additional level of quality above and beyond a basic conformity assessment of harmonised rules at a national and/or European level. It is also not possible to compare them with quality management (QM) systems. While QM systems merely comprise process descriptions and optimisations, **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES** always promote the overall quality of products and services. QM systems can be implemented as a subordinate mechanism within the self-monitoring process for the **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES**.

However, the testing of these QM systems and/or conformity assessments described above is not a task of **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**. In Germany, the accreditation process 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 labelling on the basis of a conformity assessment is the CE Mark („free trade sign“).

**RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE** is an intentionally independent, self-contained system organised under private law that indicates the quality of products and services using **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)**.

## 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. For example, a significant number of **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES** focus on areas affected by regulations dealing with building, waste, soil conservation, road traffic and/or hazardous materials law. They sometimes fulfil tasks that have been transferred to the relevant Quality Assurance Association responsible for the quality mark by legislators and regulatory authorities. As a consequence, legally stipulated components are also incorporated into the statutes in this case. This means, for example, that audited QM systems can be used in **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES** as a method of self-monitoring.

Furthermore, accreditation of the independent tester or testing institution commissioned by the Quality Assurance Association to carry out the third party monitoring may be a legal requirement. 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. Moreover, **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)** do not represent conformity with statutory requirements in this sense.

## 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** always represent more than just conformity with standards or statutory requirements. **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES** encompass 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 the **RAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM**. It is an intentionally independent, self-contained system organised under private law that indicates the special quality of the products and services using **RAL GÜTEZEICHEN (QUALITY MARKS)**.

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.





*Simply Excellent.*

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