BIFMA INTERNATIONAL

The Industry Voice for Workplace Solutions

FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions re: Furniture Emissions Standards

1. What are the ANSI/BIFMA Furniture Emission Standards?
There are two standards: the ANSI/BIFMA M7.1 test method and the ANSI/BIFMA X7.1 conformance criteria. Both have been subjected to an open, balanced, consensus forum with a broad range of stakeholders including architects, designers, laboratories, scientists, manufacturers and government agencies. Both were approved as American National Standards in September 2007.

2. Why did BIFMA develop these standards?
BIFMA began investigating the feasibility of developing a common standard for measuring furniture emissions in 1994 following a casual inquiry from the U.S. General Service Administration (GSA). BIFMA's early work in this area, along with other stakeholders, resulted in establishment of the Environmental Technology Verification (ETV) large chamber protocol released by the U.S. EPA in 1999. The BIFMA work gained momentum in 2004 as we focused efforts toward providing an open, balanced, consensus based alternative for achieving the low emitting furniture credit within the USGBC LEED rating system. BIFMA believes that the marketplace would benefit by having one consensus standard, a common method of evaluating furniture emissions that is publicly available to all customers, manufacturers, labs and certification bodies.

3. Who was involved in their development?
BIFMA gathered a broad and diverse group of stakeholders to participate in the development of these standards including manufacturers, suppliers, regulatory agencies, customers, end users, specifiers, certification bodies, test labs, academia and others. It represents the input and consensus agreement of a broad, diverse and balanced group of interests.

4. What where the project objectives?
Project objectives were to:

- Direct marketplace demand toward a credible, open, balanced, consensus based standard;
- Minimize marketplace confusion that can result from a proliferation of independently developed standards and/or proprietary certification programs;
- Create an environment where access to emissions testing is available to all segments of the industry;
- Establish a cost competitive environment for conformance verification; and
- Provide a reasonable and cost effective path for companies seeking to develop increasingly low emitting products.

5. What's the advantage of the FES to manufacturers?
There are numerous advantages to utilizing a common, consensus based emission test standard.

- It offers a credible, scientific emissions standard that serves as an alternative to satisfy the USGBC LEED-CI EQ 4.5 credit requirement and provides sample acquisition, packaging, and shipping procedure information, which is missing from Option B.
- It enables the identification of additional commercial test labs capable of conducting IAQ tests.
- It provides screening tools for determining major emission sources from office system furniture components and materials.
- It represents standards based on the combined research and input of scientists, technical professionals and manufacturers so that the most current information on what customers purchase and how they use it is integrated into the standards.

6. What's the advantage of the FES to the marketplace?
There are numerous advantages to utilizing a common, consensus based emissions test standard for the marketplace.

- As a result of the ANSI consensus process specifiers can be confident that the standard is credible and that all stakeholder points of view have been heard and considered.
- The standard will facilitate more understandable, meaningful and direct marketplace comparisons.
- The open, accessible nature of the standard will promote a competitive market environment resulting in more cost effective offerings.

7. How will BIFMA ensure acceptance of the standard by the A&D community?
We believe that appropriate steps have been taken to develop a leading edge, credible, open and consensus-based standard. BIFMA's utilization of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) "canvass method" of determining consensus ensures that all interested and affected parties have an opportunity to provide comment and input into the document. The approval body must have balance across a variety of constituent groups with diverse interests. We have engaged the regulatory community, the A&D community, customers and multiple stakeholder groups. All of these steps should help ensure acceptance of this standard among customers, specifiers and manufacturers.

8. What other stakeholders support the ANSI/BIFMA emissions standards?
A broad range of stakeholders including the U.S. General Services Administration, the Canadian General Standards Board, multiple test laboratories, scientists, architects, interior designers and manufacturers have voted in favor of approval of these standards as ANSI standards. The USGBC has incorporated them into the LEED-CI credit for low-emitting furniture, SCS incorporated them into the SCS Indoor Advantage™ and SCS Indoor Advantage™ Gold certification program, and NSF International has incorporated these standards into the NSF indoor air quality certification program. In addition, the state governments of California and Minnesota have adopted the ANSI/BIFMA emissions test method into their purchase specifications for office furniture.

9. How does this standard work with the LEED rating system?
Utilization of the ANSI/BIFMA Furniture Emissions Standards is recognized in LEED-CI under the Environmental Quality 4.5 credit (Option C) for low emitting furniture.

10. What is Option C?
Option C is a third compliance path for achieving the LEED-CI EQ 4.5 credit for low-emitting materials, systems furniture and seating products. It is based on the ANSI/BIFMA Furniture Emissions Standards. It was approved by the U. S. Green Building Council July 12, 2006, as a third alternative to LEED-CI EQ 4.5 Options A or B.

11. Why is USGBC acceptance of Option C important?
The USGBC's ruling followed months of investigation, including holding a public comment period, regarding the technical merit of the BIFMA furniture emissions standards. The USGBC Environmental Quality Technical Advisory Group (TAG), chaired by Bob Thompson, Chief of the U. S. EPA Indoor Environment Management Branch, determined that the BIFMA FES are technically equivalent to Greenguard (Option A), when used with a qualified third party to demonstrate compliance with the requirements in the LEED-CI EQ 4.5 credit. This ruling opens up testing to multiple qualified laboratories throughout North America. Additionally, option C provides sample acquisition, packaging, and shipping procedure information, which is missing from Option B.

12. How are emissions from furniture measured?
Emission levels are measured by unpacking new furniture product(s) and placing the product into a clean test chamber under controlled conditions. After a period of time has passed, samples of air from the chamber are taken and analyzed to measure the concentration of emissions from the furniture. The chamber test results are then used to estimate the impact of furniture emissions on building indoor air quality using a modeled office environment.

13. How are claims of conformance made?
In keeping with American National Standards Institute (ANSI) policies the standards are available for first-party (the producer), second party (the customer), or third-party (a party independent from first or second) claims of conformance. It is up to the company to determine which type of conformance verification is most appropriate for their business.

14. Will BIFMA test and certify member's products to the standard?
No, as with all BIFMA standards our role is to develop the standards using an open, balanced, consensus process and place them into the public domain for use by manufacturers, suppliers, customers, specifiers, test labs, third-party certifiers, etc. BIFMA does not test products nor maintain a product certification program.

15. What is the difference between ANSI/BIFMA FES and Greenguard?
ANSI/BIFMA M7.1 is an emissions test method for furniture products, ANSI/BIFMA X7.1 cites related conformance criteria. Greenguard is a certification program covering a variety of building products. The protocols are similar and have been determined to be technically equivalent by the LEED-CI EQ TAG for the purposes of LEED-CI.

16. Will BIFMA coordinate third-party certification or make these resources known to member companies?
BIFMA will maintain a list of resources that companies can reference, evaluate and potentially use for conformance verification.

17. Will I still need to invest in other emissions certifications?

The decision to participate in other standards or certification programs is up to individual companies. The ANSI/BIFMA Furniture Emissions Standards are publicly available for use by any manufacturer, customer, test lab and/or certification body.

18. What will it cost to evaluate a product to the standard?
There are several considerations when evaluating costs. First, is the cost of process and/or product improvements required to comply with the conformance criteria. These costs could vary significantly from company to company based on unique circumstances.

Then there is the cost of product testing which can vary with the breadth of the product line and complexity of the product. There is also the cost of conformance verification. If a company elects to use first-party verification there are likely no additional costs. If a company chooses to utilize an independent third party for conformance verification these costs will vary based on the number of product lines being certified, the breadth of those lines, and the certification body selected.

19. As a BIFMA member, do all my product lines have to comply with this standard?
All BIFMA standards are voluntary. On a product-by-product basis, each company needs to determine if this standard meets their needs and the needs of their customers.

20. Once a product is evaluated does conformance need to be continually updated?
Products should be re-evaluated if significant design or sourcing changes have occurred, and at a minimum every three years. If third-party conformance is pursued, that organization will likely have guidelines addressing the re-evaluation cycle.

21. How can I get more information regarding conformance options and technical issues?
Contact BIFMA at 616-285-3963. Our staff members, Tom Reardon or Dick Driscoll will be able to assist you.

BIFMA International – Nov. 14, 2007