



Resolving Certification Concerns with Transparency

For over two decades, PJR has been working diligently with thousands of satisfied clients as a trusted certification body. While disputes may occasionally arise, we take pride in the fact that we only encounter an average of about 20 disputes per year. Understanding that disputes are an essential part of the certification process, PJR ensures that concerns are addressed and resolved in an organized manner. In this blog, we will explain what constitutes a dispute, the step-by-step process PJR follows to resolve disputes, and the possible outcomes that arise from this procedure.

Disputes, also known as "appeals," refer to officially-filed disagreements raised by auditees regarding the conclusions drawn by the auditor. To initiate the dispute process, a PJR client contacts the PJR team at our headquarters in Troy, MI, requesting the "Dispute Resolution Request Form" (F-217). All dispute requests must be submitted within 15 calendar days of completing the audit, with each nonconformance documented on an individual F-217 form.

The F-217 form captures essential details about the audit in question. The "Resolution Request" section includes fields for:

1. **Certification Criteria:** The nonconformance number assigned by the auditor.
2. **Auditor/CB Finding:** A summary or direct copy of the nonconformance as issued by the auditor.
3. **Justification for Dispute Request:** A detailed description of the disagreement, encompassing points related to evidence, audit criteria, or other relevant aspects.
4. **Description of Attachments:** A comprehensive explanation of the evidence provided to substantiate the dispute, which can be submitted in any format.

Upon receiving the necessary forms and evidence, PJR schedules a dispute hearing. Led by the Dispute Chairperson, this hearing involves auditee representatives, the auditor responsible for the disputed nonconformance, and a Dispute Panel consisting of three Lead Auditors from the corresponding scheme. During the hearing, each side presents their perspective, and the panel may ask additional questions to clarify the situation.

After the hearing concludes, the Dispute Panel engages in a private discussion to render a final decision on the disputed item(s). This decision is considered binding and is communicated to the auditee. There are three possible outcomes:

1. **Upholding the disputed nonconformance:** The auditee's argument against the nonconformance is rejected, and the nonconformance must be addressed accordingly.
2. **Overturing the disputed nonconformance:** The Dispute Panel accepts the argument against the nonconformance, and the nonconformance is removed from the official audit report.
3. **Upholding but reducing the disputed nonconformance:** In this scenario, part of the nonconformance may be considered valid, while other parts may be eliminated or reduced in severity. An updated audit report is provided in such cases.

If you have any questions regarding the Dispute Process or how it aligns with your ongoing relationship with PJR, feel free to contact us by phone at [\(248\) 358-3388](tel:2483583388) or visit our website at www.pjr.com.

