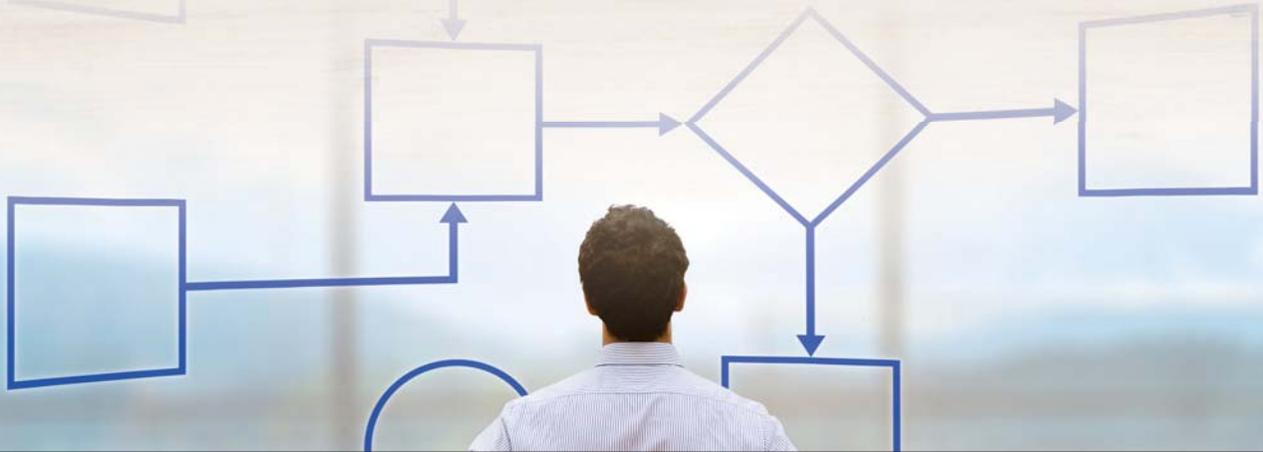




PERRY JOHNSON REGISTRARS, INC.



The Dispute Process

While PJR is pleased to say that we've worked with thousands of satisfied clients in the over twenty years our certification body has been active, we're even more proud to state that we only see an average of about 20 disputes per year. While potentially unpleasant, the dispute process is nonetheless a necessary part of certification, allowing concerns to be raised and resolved in an organized manner.

What is a dispute?

Disputes (also referred to as “appeals”) are commonly understood and accepted as an officially-filed disagreement on the auditee's part regarding one or more of the conclusions drawn by the auditor. While typically referring to nonconformances, there is no official definition for either term in ISO 17021-1:2015 or ISO 19011:2018.

The source of a dispute is usually one of two things:

- The auditor and auditee cannot come to an agreement regarding the merits of evidence; or
- The auditor and auditee cannot come to an agreement regarding the merits of relevant audit criteria.

Regardless of *why* a dispute is filed, there are some things to keep in mind before putting the dispute into motion. PJR auditors are trained and encouraged to be forthright, sharing suspected nonconformances with the auditee as soon as they are discovered. This transparency is meant to offer as wide a window as possible for the auditee to present all available evidence; thus enabling all sides to be confident that the final decision is as informed as possible. At PJR, we also emphasize to auditors that rather than arguing the merits of evidence (thus wasting valuable audit time), it is best to document the nonconformance and move on.



The dispute process step-by-step

According to ISO 17021-1:2015 clause 9.7.1, PJR is required to have a “documented process to receive, evaluate, and make decisions on appeals.” The entire process PJR uses to resolve disputes is outlined in detail in procedure PRO-10, available for download from the PJR website at any time (www.PJR.com/registration-document-download).

A PJR client begins the dispute process by reaching out the PJR team at our Troy, MI headquarters to request a copy of PJR form F-217 (“Dispute Resolution Request Form”). All dispute requests are due to PJR within 15 calendar days of an audit's completion, and each disputed nonconformance should be documented on an individual F-217.

The F-217 provides a space to record basic information regarding the details of the audit in question. Further, the “Resolution Request” section provides the following fields to be completed:

1. Certification Criteria – list 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 – this field is where the disagreement should be described. This statement should include any points of disagreement on the evidence, audit criteria, or other relevant points.
4. Description of Attachments – a detailed description of what has been provided to PJR to substantiate your dispute. (This evidence may be in any format.)

Once the necessary forms and evidence have been received by PJR, a dispute hearing will be scheduled. Led by the Dispute Chairperson, this hearing will include auditee representative(s), the auditor who wrote the nonconformance being disputed/appealed, and the Dispute Panel. This Panel will be made up of three Lead Auditors from the scheme (e.g. ISO 9001, 14001, etc.) who will make the final decision on the disputed point. Each side will be given sufficient time to explain their side of the situation, and the Dispute Panel may ask additional questions to both the auditee and the auditor.

Once the Hearing is concluded, the Panel will conduct a private discussion to render its final decision on the disputed item(s). This decision is considered final and binding, and a copy of all completed dispute decisions will be provided to the auditee.

What comes out of a dispute?

There are three possible outcomes from the Dispute Process once the Hearing has concluded.

1. The disputed nonconformance is upheld.
In this situation, the Dispute Panel has rejected the auditee's argument against the nonconformance. The nonconformance must be addressed in the fashion prescribed.
2. The disputed nonconformance is overturned.
In this situation, the Dispute Panel has accepted the argument against the nonconformance. The auditor will be instructed to remove the nonconformance from the official audit report. Once this has been done, an updated copy of the report will be provided to the auditee.
3. The disputed nonconformance is upheld but reduced.
This refers to a situation where some part of the nonconformance is seen as valid, but another part (or parts) should be eliminated. It may also refer to a situation where a major nonconformance is reduced to a minor nonconformance. An updated audit report will also be provided in this case.

At the end of the day, PJR's goal is for clients to consider us a trusted partner in the certification process, not just on audit day but beyond. Providing a straightforward Dispute Process allows us to open a channel of communication with our auditees that we hope will enhance the relationship between PJR and clients. If you have any questions regarding the Dispute Process, its documentation, or how it fits into your ongoing relationship with PJR, reach out to us by phone at **(248) 358-3388** or visit www.pjr.com.