

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS HANDLING

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1 Purpose

Complaints and requests for help arising from grievances are received from clients and users of NRCS services as well as from organizations and members of the public who may consider that the NRCS has not fulfilled its duties and obligations.

It is imperative that such matters be dealt with completely, effectively and without delay in order to take the necessary corrective action and to rectify any shortcomings in the NRCS's procedures and practices.

2 Scope

This procedure covers all complaints and concerns from persons or organizations from outside the NRCS with regard to matters arising from the NRCS's activities, as well as complaints raised by one BU or organizational unit on another. This document is applicable to all personnel involved in the handling of complaints.

3 Normative and informative references

In this document reference is made to the following:

3.1 Normative

SANS ISO 9001-2008 Quality systems - Model for quality assurance in design, development, production, installation and servicing

3.2 Informative

CSP121: NRCS improvement system

CSP124: Control of records

CSP125: Internal quality audit and management review of the NRCS Quality Management System.

4 Definitions/Abbreviations

Complaint- is any charge, objection, protest or grievance received that relates to the actions or performance of the NRCS' employees to alleged problems arising from NRCS services, but excludes customer concerns.

CEO- Chief Executive Officer

IRG- Improvement Register

IRQ- Improvement Request

BU- Business Unit

QUESH- Quality, Environmental, Safety and Health Management System

5 General rules

5.1 Handling of complaints received at BU/Departmental/Regional Office level will be delegated to the responsible person by the relevant Manager or Head. The General Manager /Regional Office Manager of the BU/ / Department/Regional Office shall ensure that all complaints are investigated and dealt with in accordance with this procedure.

5.2 The General Manager/Regional Office Manager is responsible for drawing the attention of the CEO and/or the General Manager to complaints of such a serious nature as to have wider implications than just BU//Departmental/Regional Office, and which in consequence could require action by the CEO. (See also 6.4)

5.3 Complaints received personally by the CEO or General Manager will be passed via the Manager:

QUESH directly to the relevant General Manager concerned who will be responsible for handling these complaints and for providing appropriate response and ensure corrective measures are taken. These steps should be communicated to the complainant, with copies to the original recipient.

5.4 A complaint received by another BU//Department/Regional Office shall first be acknowledged within a two working day period giving the complainant information as to who will further be handling the complaint, before passing it to the relevant General Manager, Regional Office Manager, General Manager or Departmental Manager, who will arrange for it to be registered and for an IRQ to be raised. A copy of the acknowledgement shall accompany the complaint.

5.5 Complaints which have possible legal implications must be referred to the Manager: Legal Services for advice before any statement is made or correspondence is sent to the complainant. Such advice shall be given within 2 working days of receipt of the request by the Manager: Legal Services.

5.6 Complaints against NRCS staff members should not be recorded in the Improvement Register or as an Improvement Request but be directed to the line superior of the accused staff member who must deal with the complaint through the NRCS's disciplinary procedure (CSP620).

5.7 All relevant records pertaining to a Customer Complaint must be kept for a term storage period of 3 years (see CSP124).

6 Procedures

Complaints may be received in different ways e.g. verbally, telephonically, during a discussion or meeting, and in writing. It is essential to obtain as much information as possible) particularly the source of the complaint, i.e. name, address, telephone number, also all proven facts and, if possible, physical evidence, e.g. samples of defective goods. Verbal complaints should be confirmed in writing by the complainant, where possible.

6.1 Procedure on receipt of complaint

6.1.1 Complaints will be acknowledged in writing within 2 working days by the recipient from date of receipt.

6.1.2 All complaints received by central post or facsimile for the attention of the CEO or General Manager must first be forwarded to the Manager: QUESH for central registration and follow-up control on behalf of the CEO and the General Manager.

Rule: Should a complaint be received that could have as a root cause a problem with Compulsory Standards (VC's), Technical Regulations, Inspection Testing or in combination with one or two of the other services of the NRCS, the General Manager will, after evaluation of the complaint, allocate the complaint to a specific BU to take the lead in addressing the problem, and to ensure liaison with other relevant BU's. In cases where the customer complaint has not been resolved and no feedback has been received by the Manager: QUESH, by the two week deadline date, the Manager shall forward an internal memorandum to the responsible person, requesting feedback. The following information shall be included in the memorandum:

- a) The date on which the complaint was registered;
- b) two weeks deadline date - This date is fourteen days after date of receipt;
- c) request for a copy of the IRQ issued;
- d) request for a copy of the corrective action plan/interim report; and
- e) if applicable, reason why the complaint could not be closed out within the required two week period.

6.1.3 All complaints received will be recorded in an official Improvement Register (see Annexure B of CSP121), which is kept in the relevant Manager's Office. In Departments/Regional Offices where there is

a Quality Control Officer, the Quality Control Officer shall maintain the register. The person who registers the complaint shall be at an unaffected level - this person may also be the Quality Control Officer, unless the complaint is against his services, in which case his manager shall register the complaint. Statistical summaries of complaints will be presented and discussed at BU//Departmental/Regional Officer Management System Review and ExCo Operational meetings (see CSP125).

6.1.4 Improvement Registers will be reviewed quarterly and formally by the General Manager/Regional Office Manager and will be analyzed as formal reports for consideration during Corporate Management Review meetings (see CSP125).

6.2 Procedure for corrective/preventative/improvement actions

The investigation of complaints to establish the root causes (not the superficial symptoms) of the complaints and to develop acceptable solutions is the responsibility of the relevant Manager. In the event of the General Manager/Regional Office Manager or General Manager having to take specific actions the General Manager/Regional Office Manager will keep records of such actions.

Rule: A mandatory IRQ shall be raised

- a) for a complaint from a client (see CSP121), user of an NRCS service, organization or member of the public who may consider that the NRCS has not fulfilled its duties and obligations;
- b) for any concern or complaint against the NRCS that may involve legal action (including misuse of any NRCS test reports);

Note: The requirement of clause (b) above does not include results of tests performed by the NRCS that may be used in a test sponsor's subsequent litigation against a third party.

- c) where misrepresentation of the NRCS or its registered certification marks is involved.

6.2.1 Each Manager tasked with the above investigation will keep the General Manager/Regional Office Manager concerned informed of progress by means of the monthly report and will ensure that the relevant records, e.g. of communications, are entered in the register so as to provide up to date progress information on the investigation. When the complaint takes longer than 2 weeks to resolve/clear an interim report with a corrective action plan will be sent to the complainant.

6.2.2 On completion of such investigations, the Manager concerned will close out the particular complaint, keeping his General Manager/Regional Office Manager informed by means of the monthly report. A final conclusion to the complaint will be formally recorded in the complainant's file or on the close-out letter/fax/ E-mail.

Corrective actions necessitated by complaints, e.g. to rectify defective procedures or to recall faulty products, must be initiated and monitored by the General Manager, with the agreement of the General Manager/Regional Office Manager concerned. Procedures shall be in place for product complaints that cannot practically be handled in accordance with CSP121.

6.3 Procedure to close a complaint

6.3.1 Closure

Each complainant will receive a formal report on completion of the investigation. If, after an initial examination of the problem, a lengthy investigation is anticipated i.e. longer than 2 weeks; the complainant must be advised and be given an indication of when the final report will be ready. An interim report must then be presented to the complainant with an action plan that indicates when the complaint will eventually be resolved (see 6.2.1).

Rule: Reports and letters relating to complaints with a legal implication shall be signed by the General Manager/ Regional Office Manager. Reports and letters relating to all other complaints shall be signed by the relevant Manager.

6.3.2 Customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction survey

Once the customer complaint has been closed out, the General Manager/Regional Office Manager/Manager: QUESH, as relevant, shall send a letter to the complainant, confirming close-out in the improvement register and requesting completion of a "Survey. Confirmation of effective close-out of customer complaint" (see Annexure A for example). In the event that a complainant feels that the complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily, the survey results on completion of such investigations, the Manager concerned will close out the particular complaint, shall be actioned by the General Managers/Regional Office Managers or the General Manager, as applicable, will investigate the problem completely and will reply personally in writing to the complainant. If the complainant is still dissatisfied, the survey results shall be brought to the attention of the CEO, who will involve the General Manager and relevant General Manager or Regional Office Manager in the examination of the problem. The CEO may sign the considered reply or may delegate it to the General Manager or the applicable General Manager/Regional Office Manager.

6.4 Procedure for serious complaints

Correspondence relating to serious complaints (i.e. those complaints which could require action by the CEO see 5.2) will be sent in the name of the CEO or General Manager. Copies of all such correspondence with customers in connection with complaints will be recorded in the improvement register. In the event of corrective action being required by or against an organization e.g. an importer of goods which do not conform to a compulsory specification, a letter in the name of the General Manager/Regional Office Manager concerned will be sent to the complainant.

6.5 Procedure for complaints with legal implications

In the event of legal action arising or threatened as a result of any complaint, e.g. a claim for compensation from the NRCS, the Manager: Legal Services will assist the General Manager/Regional Office Manager concerned to facilitate suitable action.

6.6 Appeals

When all possible effort has been made by the NRCS (see 6.3.2), but these actions do not satisfy the complainant, the complainant may raise the issue with the minister of Trade and Industry.

7 Records

- 7.1 Letter/fax of acknowledgement of complaint.
- 7.2 Intermediate reports and/or corrective action plans.
- 7.3 Close-out letter/fax/report.
- 7.4 Improvement Request.
- 7.5 Improvement Register.

8 Forms

Form AZ128: IRQ: Improvement Request
Form AZ131: IRG: Improvement Register
Form AZ132: Customer Complaints register

9 Replacement and withdrawal

This is the first edition

10 Annexure

None