

SONCAP CERTIFICATE; A REQUIREMENT FOR IMPORTATION OF GOODS INTO NIGERIA

1. Introduction

The Standard Organisation of Nigeria (SON) was established by the Standard Organisation of Nigeria Act (No 56) of 1971 with the mandate to set the Standards for manufacturing and sale of products, materials, processes and services amongst others; to certify and provide assistance in the production of quality of goods and services; and improve measurement accuracies and circulation of information relating to standards.

The SON in 2005, introduced the Standards Organisation of Nigeria Conformity Assessment Program (the “Program”) to address the problem of substandard and unsafe products imported into the country. Under the Program, certain imported products¹, are required to be inspected to conform with essential requirements, technical regulations and approved industrial standards before importation into Nigeria.

For convenience and efficiency, the SON accredited some independent firms such as Cotecna, Intertek, SGS, CCIC etc (“Accredited Firms”) to process and issue SONCAP Certificate on behalf of the SON².

In today’s newsletter, we summarise the procedure and steps to obtaining a SONCAP Certificate below.

2. What are the steps to obtaining a SONCAP Certificate

A Product Certificate (“PC”) is a mandatory requirement for products regulated by the SON. The PC is also a pre-requisite for the issuance of a SONCAP Certificate for imported products. There are three (3) categories of PCs and an importer may make an application based on frequency as described in the table below.

	PC type	Preference	Validity Period
	Product Certificate one	Preferred for one-time importers	6 months
	Product Certificate two	Preferred for occasional importers	1 year
	Product Certificate three	Preferred for frequent importers	1 year

3. How should an application for a PC be made?

An application for a PC should be accompanied by the following documents³;

- i. an application form;
- ii. an ISO 9001 Certificate of the manufacturer;
- iii. a test report of the product from an accredited ISO17025 laboratory⁴;
- iv. a quality declaration from the manufacturer;
- v. a picture of the product or a sample of the product (where the Accredited Firm requests);
- vi. all other quality documents available; and
- vii. a Factory Inspection/Audit (applicable only for PC 3).

4. How long does it take to process a PC?

Provided that all the required information and documentation are satisfactory, the PC will generally be issued between three to seven (3-7) days depending on the Accredited Firm.

5. What is the next step after obtaining the PC?

The next step is to obtain an e-Form M⁵ required for the clearing of products at the Nigerian port. The PC is used to process the e-Form M on the Nigerian Single window for trade portal or through an authorised dealer (usually a commercial bank). Upon approval by an authorised dealer and registration by the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), the importer may then proceed to apply for a SONCAP Certificate.

Upon successfully obtaining the e-Form M, the importer may apply for a SONCAP Certificate through one of the Accredited Firms. The SONCAP Certificate is linked to the PC obtained for the product and a particular shipment may or may not be subject to inspection based on the category of the PC obtained as described in the table below.

PC Type	Inspection Rate
Product Certificate one	100% inspection rate
Product Certificate two	40% inspection rate
Product Certificate three	20% inspection rate

6. How should an application for SONCAP be made?

To process a SONCAP Certificate, a company will be required to provide the following:

- i. a SONCAP application/ request for certificate form;
- ii. a valid PC for each product;
- iii. Tax Identification Number;
- iv. Pro forma Invoice; and
- v. E-Form M.

7. Conclusion

A SONCAP Certificate is a condition precedent required for the clearance of products at the Nigerian port⁶. This has played a pivotal role in reducing the importation and sale of substandard products in the country. The Program has proven to be a step in the right direction in ensuring the availability of quality products in Nigeria.

¹ https://son.gov.ng/soncap_service

² These Accredited Firms have offices in several countries across the world.

³ In some cases, Accredited Firms may request additional information/documentation in respect of certain products.

⁴ Where the importer is unable to produce a satisfactory test report, the Accredited Firm shall test the product based on SON standards.

⁵ This is used by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to track and collect import duties.

⁶ It is pertinent to note that some products are exempt from the Program pursuant to a SON Circular with reference number SON/SONCAP/EX/Vol. 1/005. These products which include, food, medicine and medical products, chemical products etc, are nonetheless subject to other regulatory requirements.