

Short Paper Submission to the Congreso Internacional del Auga, 2015.

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Keywords: AQUACERT, water quality, water safety, management, international certification, health

Abstract

The Aquacert certification was developed in 2003 in response to the proliferation of regulations and control points within services based on water and intended for consumption or to human health.

This certification has been officially developed by focusing on the process control products and derivatives based on thermal water, implemented as part of health care.

Entrusted to specialist-expert auditors, this certification scheme is already developing very rapidly in the French medical spa sector (Avène, La Roche-Posay, Vichy, Dax, Balaruc-Les-Bains, La Bourboule, Chaudes-Aigues, Vittel ... etc.). In the international landscape, it unifies the health risks of management systems of institutions delivering products or services based on water and intended for consumption or for human health. Thus, it helps make them more readable commitments and recognition by consumers.



Figure 1. Aquacert certification generic logo

AQUACERT Genesis

The Aquacert certification was developed in 2003 in response to the proliferation of regulations and control points within the water and health sectors. The growing concern of regulators and consumers, in terms of safety, required, in fact, a professional approach and easily recognizable for monitoring the quality of institutions delivering products or services based on water and intended for consumption or to human health.

Professionals of these sectors had to deal with food safety standards (ISO standards) or medical practices standards (v2010 HAS) that are not dedicated to their process and their culture, and not consistent with Water Safety Plans of WHO. Moreover, private certification bodies use to employ quality or food safety auditors who are not experts of the water and health sector. More than that, it can have for consequence to certify unsafe organisms.

Furthermore, certifications that are used are only known on the B to B markets, and not by the consumers.

Thus, the Aquacert certification has initially been developed by a group of experts, scientists and professionals of the thermal waters, accompanied by representatives of consumers and the French Ministry of Health. This certification has been developed by focusing on the process control products and derivatives based on thermal water, implemented as part of health care.

The certification scheme elaboration took more than 5 years to be completed and recognized by every stakeholders. In France AQUACERT HACCP *thermalisme* (AQUACERT certification dedicated to

medical thermal spa) is now included in the French regulation and is taken into account by national and local control authorities.

Aquacert international

Under the impetus of various interested parties, Aquacert today becomes an international NGO, real interested multiparty collaboration platform for the development and regulation of water and health certifications. Aquacert, multistakeholder approach by his party, is a solution to ensure fairness and transparency for water quality for users / consumers worldwide. In line with international and national standards bodies, accreditation bodies or recognition of the sector's professional skills, this NGO is currently initiating pilot development work worldwide. (figure 2)

Aquacert International is in charge to lead the elaboration of the certification schemes in each country. Most of the work is done using dematerialized internet platforms that are deployed for each project of standard.

The certifications schemes, once validated, are operated by private certification bodies (CB). These certification bodies that want to lead Aquacert audits have to be accredited and licensed by Aquacert International. It can be done by a real assessment of the CB, by Aquacert International staff.

Furthermore, it is clear that most of the certification audits are made by subcontractor's auditors (Freelance auditors in most of cases). Thus, it seems really important to manage the qualification procedures and qualifying training procedures. This is one of the objectives of Aquacert International.

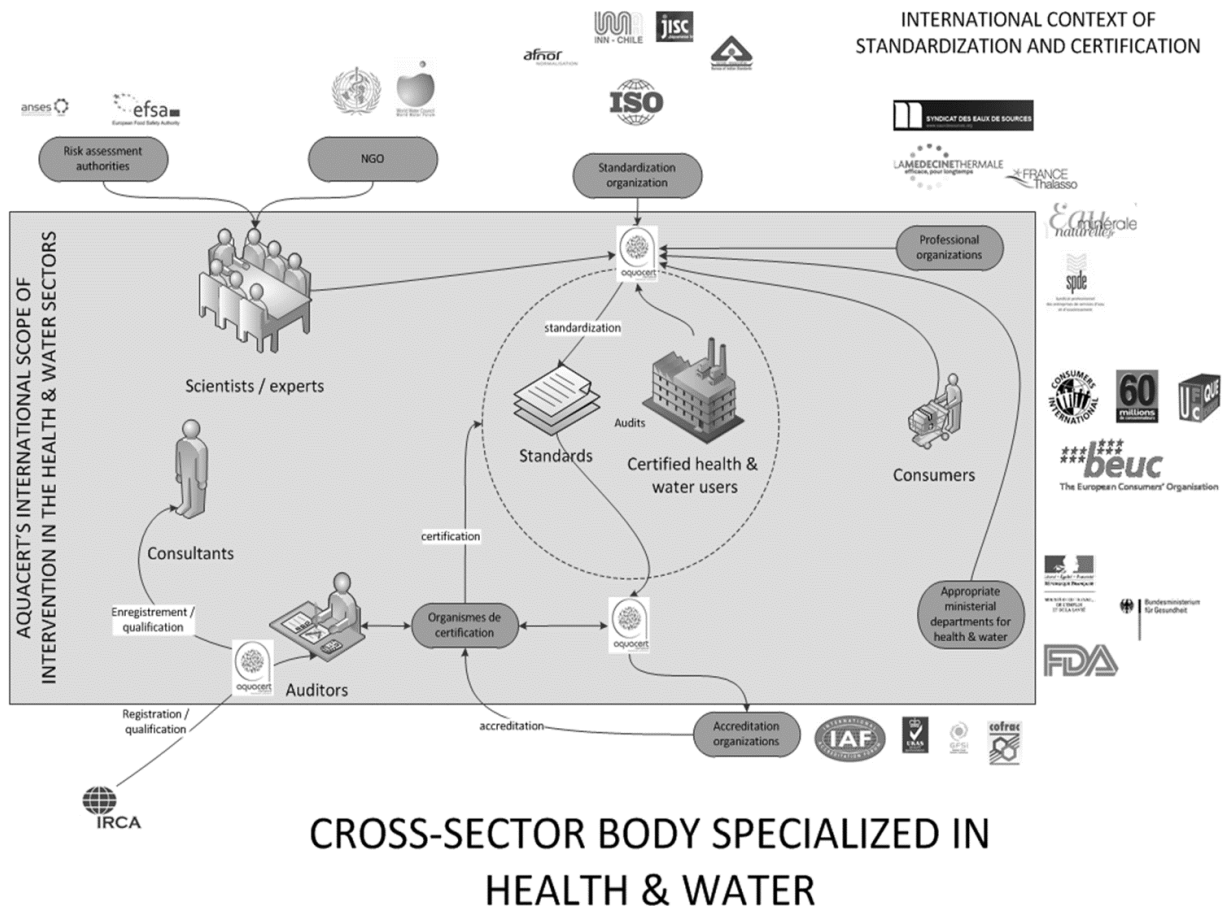


Figure 2. AQUACERT INTERNATIONAL SCOPE OF INTERVENTION¹

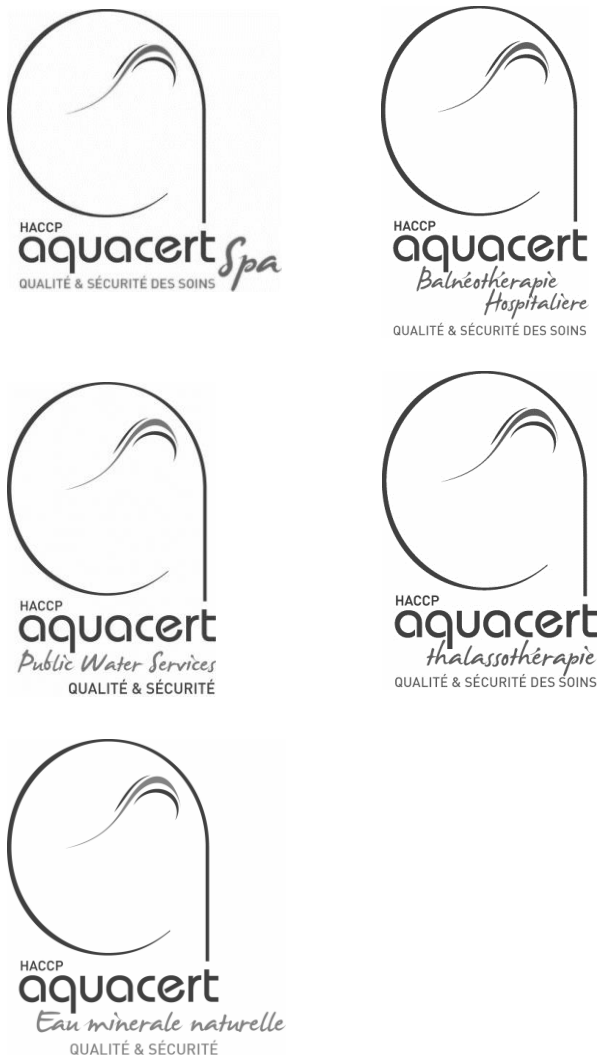
¹ This figure shows examples of national or international organizations that can be considered to understand Aquacert International positioning. It is not necessarily

organizations that have been working with Aquacert international.

How to be Aquacert certified

First of all, the organism that want to be certified have to select the adapted standard. For example, a leisure spa will not be assessed the same way as a medical thermal or seawater spa. The standards are also different for bottlers or drinking water suppliers.

It is really important so that final consumers can understand quickly what these organisms are certified for.



More than the standard that must be selected, the organism has to specify the type of water it uses and the different water treatment devices implemented.

There is an international standard that is completed by certification guidelines which introduce parameters for water quality and best process operating practices that should be applied.

If the local regulations are at least as strict as the guidelines' requirements, the organism will be assessed regarding to these local regulations. On the

other hand, if there is no regulation concerning water quality or water control or whether the local rules are not as preventive, the certification audit will be led regarding certification guidelines' requirements.

Furthermore, national approaches can be developed to elaborate specific certification schemes with different stakeholders. For example, in France, French Health ministry, consumer' associations' representatives, professionals representative recognized the national certification scheme. Thus, the French regulations take into account Aquacert certification to adapt the official control pressure. For instance, certified medical spas are in charge of 2/3 of the total microbiological water control plan.

To be certified, the establishment has to dedicate a team to quality and water safety management system. The members of this team have to be trained to HACCP and water safety methodologies.

Aquacert standards make emerge the concept of "Management of the Water Safety System" applicable to the process "Water and Health", particularly with significant microbiological risk.

The establishment has to assess risks for consumers safety (using HACCP methodology) for every step of the water process, and other derivative products (cosmetics, muds, thermal gases). Control measures for each step have to be determined and validated. All staff have to be trained to apply compliant procedures. The most important measures have to be monitored and corrections have to be anticipated in case of non-compliance detection.

The establishment has also to manage purchase and supply chain activities.

Customer reception and care practices have to be raised to a high level and demonstrated efficiency.

Work has to be done to demonstrate competence of each staff involved in the water quality management. Skills and knowledge management methodologies have to be implemented.

Furthermore, procedures must be implemented to ensure continuous improvement of quality and water safety management system, including internal audit, corrective actions management, compliance and performance measurement.

If there is an internal microbiological and/or chemical laboratory, specific requirements have to be satisfied.

Compilation of water quality results compilation have to be regularly communicated to the certification body.

This certification is already developing very rapidly in the French medical spa sector (Avène, La Roche-Posay, Vichy, Dax, Balaruc-Les-Bains, La Bourboule, Chaudes-Aigues, Vittel ... etc.). In the international landscape, it unifies the health risks of management systems of institutions delivering products or services based on water and intended for consumption or for human health. Thus, it helps make them more readable commitments and recognition by consumers.

Aquacert now concerns the drinking water producers, bottlers, thalassotherapy, spa professionals and spa hospital. True risk management approach this certification is a guarantee of security for customers, consumers and patients.

Specialized in the fields of water (hydrotherapy, drinking water, hospital therapy, bottling and laboratory microbiological analysis of water ... etc.) the authors of this abstract are at the origin of the Aquacert certification (www.aquacert-certification.fr).

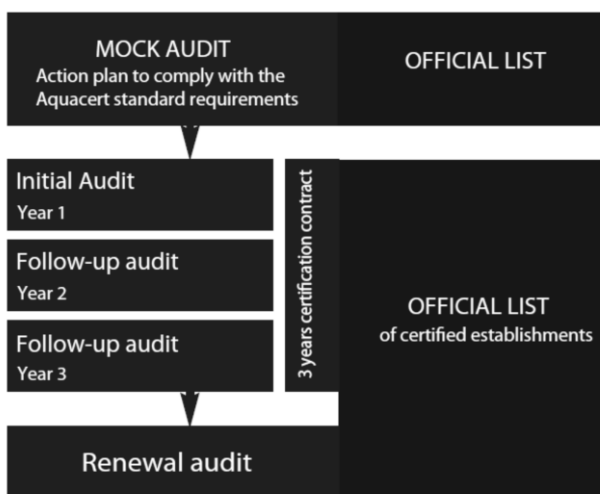


Figure 3. Certification cycle