

Questions and answers

GOT A QUESTION?

Below is a list of questions and answers about Qualmark's introduction of the Responsible Tourism Operations criteria. If you have any further queries, email enquiries@qualmark.co.nz or freephone **0800 QUALMARK**.

Why is Qualmark introducing this criteria into its assessment systems?

Environmental content has been included in Qualmark's assessment programme since 2002. Funding for the extension and development of these criteria was announced in August 2006.

The New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015 reinforces that at an industry level the country needs to demonstrate it is as environmentally sustainable as possible.

Qualmark's role is to introduce environmental criteria into its quality assurance assessment systems. In addition to the Responsible Tourism resources, this will assist New Zealand tourism operators to introduce sustainability practices and good environmental management within their organisations.

What's the industry doing overall?

New Zealand's tourism industry is working to ensure that we respond to increasing concerns about looking after our environmental responsibility. The concept of Responsible Tourism is simply about sustainability – introducing activities that lead to the longevity of our industry so that future generations can enjoy what New Zealand has to offer. It also concerns the economic sustainability of the industry. Some New Zealand tourism operators have already embraced sustainability as a standout feature, whilst others have recognised substantial cost savings in introducing energy efficiencies. A number have also participated in the regional Sustainable Tourism Charter Groups.

What percentage of our overall score does the environmental criteria comprise?

Environmental practice is part of the overall Qualmark assessment. For accommodation and venues, 5% of the total; for visitor activities, services and transport, 8% of the total. Qualmark will review the weightings over time, in line with visitor expectations of environmental issues.

Why this particular weighting?

Whilst some businesses are already adopting sustainability practices to help protect our environment, others have not. We recognise that initially this issue may challenge some operators. Qualmark is aiming to provide those businesses with the resources and support to build up this aspect of their business and get some improvements under way.

What does our business have to do, as a minimum?

International visitors expect to be able to recycle their rubbish, and providing them with this option is one important minimum requirement. Another is to complete a checklist (such as the Responsible Tourism Checklist provided in the guide) to have a good look at your business and find out where improvements can be made. We know that not every area offers recycling, and you won't be penalised if this holds true for your region. However, we'll encourage you to reduce your amount of waste by following the tips in the information provided. Refer to the criteria page at the back of this document – there you'll find the other minimum requirements for the environmental section of the Qualmark criteria.

When will the new criteria be introduced, and how will these be assessed?

We'll start assessments that include Responsible Tourism Operations criteria in mid 2008. These will form part of the existing annual on-site visits that Qualmark assessors make to all tourism businesses with a Qualmark licence.

Will our accommodation's star grading be affected by this new criteria?

It *might* if you do nothing in this area, and aren't making other improvements. The criteria counts for 5% towards your total Qualmark assessment score.

Does the Qualmark criteria affect my Qualmark annual licence fee?

Not at all. The criteria, the Responsible Tourism Guide and the Responsible Tourism section in your on-site assessment are all covered as part of your current annual licence fee.

How much will complying with the criteria cost me?

In terms of time, completing a Responsible Tourism Checklist is a minimum requirement. It will also take some time for you to ensure you're meeting the other minimum requirements. From there, it's over to you to decide how much further you want to go. You can decide on putting environmental practices in place progressively and at your own pace.

In terms of money, some initiatives may involve some initial investment. Such initiatives may provide savings in the long term. Many other initiatives simply require consideration, commitment and staff training, and may generate savings as well.

How do I decide on what activities our business could introduce?

Completing a Responsible Tourism Checklist is the best place to start – this will help you to identify areas for improvement, and decide which activities make sense for you and your business.

How does this criteria relate to other accreditation schemes?

Although you won't gain scores for membership of other environmental or sustainability programmes or schemes, initiatives you've learned about and are doing as a result of such programmes are likely to earn you scoring within the Qualmark criteria. Qualmark assessments will recognise results and performance, rather than enrolment in a programme.

Who has Qualmark worked with to develop this criteria and the Responsible Tourism Guide?

Qualmark has developed the criteria and supporting information from international resources, models and advice, along with a number of New Zealand experts. We acknowledge and thank Tourism New Zealand, the New Zealand Automobile Association, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry for the Environment, the Department of Conservation, the Sustainable Business Network, the Ministry of Tourism Sustainable Tourism Charter Groups, the Green Tourism Business Scheme (U.K.) Ltd, and all those industry associations and operators who have offered us suggestions or allowed us to look into these aspects within their businesses to help us work towards this common goal.

Are visitors making decisions based on environmental performance?

Globally, tourists are increasingly looking at the environmental impact their holidays have.

Research indicates that visitors to New Zealand come here to see our stunning and pristine natural environment, and how we're preserving this for future generations, as opposed to a simple response to the climate change debate.

Tourism New Zealand's Visitor Satisfaction Research (2006/2007) showed that visitors expect to see recycling, energy and water conservation and waste reduction initiatives in their accommodation. In the activities sector, visitors also want to see conservation efforts, environmental enhancements, visitor impact reduction strategies, environmental education and fuel efficiency initiatives.

You can let visitors know about the initiatives you've taken in environmental areas by reading the information in the section headed "Guide to writing your Responsible Tourism statement".

In addition, if you score three or above in the Responsible Tourism Operations criteria, your business will be eligible to display a Qualmark Enviro-Bronze, Enviro-Silver or Enviro-Gold logo on your website, online information and other promotional material.

Looking forward, Qualmark is also considering the introduction of specific forms of recognition (such as awards) for businesses that score highly in environmental criteria.

What other recognition will there be for operators that are achieving highly in this area?

In addition to the Qualmark logo development (outlined on page 8), Qualmark is investigating other opportunities to enable high-performers to receive recognition for their efforts. More information on these will be announced during 2008.

See page 8 for conditions on using the logos for recognition in Responsible Tourism.

What are the real benefits of the Qualmark criteria?

The 100% Pure New Zealand brand provides us with an opportunity other countries can only wish for. Its influence defines how our country is viewed across the globe. Our challenge, both as tourism operators and as New Zealanders, is how we deal with the responsibility of preserving our natural heritage and keeping it alive for the world to admire and respect. The way in which we respond to these challenges and opportunities, both individually and collectively, will have a major impact on our future prosperity and define us as a people.

Integrating the environmental criteria within the existing official quality assurance framework of Qualmark means businesses will be able to demonstrate they have a verified environmental programme under way, that's appropriate for their business.

Right now is the time to seize that opportunity – YOU can make a difference.