



NET ZERO ACTIVE CERTIFICATION STANDARD

VERSION 1.0

DATE OF ISSUE: 25TH SEPTEMBER 2026

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1. INTRODUCTION

Net Zero Eyecare, Net Zero Carbon Certification for Practices

Rapid decarbonisation across all sectors is imperative to counter the increasing severity of global climate change, mandating coordination with global Net Zero objectives – to reduce global emissions to >90% of their baseline level by 2050 at the latest, with residual emissions balanced at that time by credible carbon removal projects. No business, of any size in any sector, should feel that they cannot meaningfully contribute to this goal.

With the release of the Science Based Targets Initiative’s Corporate Standard v2.0, the importance of action over ambition has never been clearer. As such, in this standard we encourage optical businesses to set ambitious reduction targets – such that require influencing their Scope 3 contributors to facilitate carbon reductions – but then focus more on the implementation of demonstrable actions within a reporting period can confidently align with pursuing and maintaining carbon reductions. Such actions include the sourcing of zero-carbon or renewable energy, and supply chain engagements as outlined first in our Verified Carbon Reduction Plan standard.

A second important element to come from the SBTi’s v2.0 standard is clarity on the pursuit of Ongoing Emissions Responsibility – how an entity can meaningfully engage with their indirect or unavoidable emissions in ways which can credibly be said to make a beneficial contribution to climate action and sustainable development, but that cannot be included within annual carbon accounts or emissions reduction targets.

To that end, we encourage optical practices to implement a comprehensive recycling scheme to address hard-to-recycle plastics that, without an accessible recycling programme are likely to end their lives in landfill or “waste-to-energy” incineration.

We further encourage optical businesses of any size to take responsibility for their unavoidable annual emissions by financially supporting credible climate action projects, such as those provided by the Gold Standard, to a degree at least equivalent to their residual annual emissions. We emphasize that this important action must not take precedence over the implementation of strategic efforts to make meaningful reductions in accordance with a Carbon Reduction Plan, though carries substantial additional benefits.

This standard establishes whether an entity can credibly claim to be pursuing Net Zero to the fullest extent of their ability, with all facets of such action to be readily and comprehensively evidenced.

Certification Applicants

This standard is designed to be used by Optical Practices and Suppliers. Applicants eligible for this Net Zero Active certification include but are not limited to:

Optical Practices (singular or group)
Suppliers
Manufacturers

How this standard fits within Net Zero Eyecare certifications

The Net Zero Commitment sets the foundation and intent to pursue Net Zero through to fulfillment, and thereby is a pre-requisite to the Net Zero Active certification.

The Powered By Renewables/ Powered Without Carbon certification standard is also factored into this standard, as an essential and accessible carbon-reduction action.

The Verified Carbon Reduction Plan standard then mandates that an entity complete all relevant scopes and categories of emissions inventory, before then plotting their progress to $\geq 90\%$ reductions on their baseline by 2045, and providing demonstrable annual actions to pursue further reductions. That standard aligns the entity with Net Zero and sets them on-track to future potential reductions.

Then, to cover Ongoing Emissions Responsibilities, this standard requires the implementation of a Optical Recycling Scheme, and requires the investment in climate action projects at least equal to annual emissions, as outlined in our earlier Carbon Balanced [] standards.

Standard Revisions

This standard is revised annually by the Net Zero Eyecare steering group with input from key and relevant parties, unless situations change so severely as to warrant more regular revision. To submit comments on this standard at any time, please email andrew@netzeroeyecare.org

2. CRITERIA FOR CERTIFICATION

Eligibility for Net Zero Carbon certification must be assessed by a Net Zero Eyecare Approved Auditor. The Approved Auditor will, over the course of an audit conducted in-person or via video-call, ascertain whether, by the end of the audit process, the Applicant meets the criteria outlined herein.

2.1 CORE ACTIVITIES

2.1.1 Net Zero Commitment

A commitment must be made and be easily publicly available on the Applicant's website, stating in full that the entity commits to achieving Net Zero emissions across all scopes by 2045 at the latest. Evidence must be provided that this commitment has been made under the full authority of the board / Director(s).

It is non-compulsory best practice to detail how the substantial reduction in emissions is going to be achieved, such as with reference to a Verified Carbon Reduction Plan.

2.1.2 Powered without Carbon

The Applicant must demonstrate that their current electricity supply is on a 100% Renewable, or zero carbon, tariff. REGO certificates are considered non-compulsory best-practice. The Applicant must also demonstrate that they have a formal internal commitment, signed-off by the board or Director(s) to exclusively source a zero-carbon electricity supply in perpetuity.

2.1.3 Verified Carbon Reduction Plan

The Applicant must demonstrate comprehensive annual GHG inventory / carbon accounting and reporting, detailing at least one year (the baseline) of complete records covering all scopes and categories as defined by the GHG Protocol. Reasons must be provided if any categories are considered "not-applicable".

The baseline, and any available subsequent years' carbon data must be presented in a Carbon Reduction Plan detailing short and long-term targets through to ≥90% reductions from the baseline by 2045, with descriptions of the actions committed to be undertaken to help facilitate those projected reductions.

The Carbon Reduction plan must also be signed-off by the board/Director(s).

2.1.3.1 Out of Scope Activities

Optical practices must provide a reasonable estimate of the emissions associated with patient travel for scheduled appointments in their annual reports and Carbon Reduction Plan.

2.2 ONGOING EMISSIONS RESPONSIBILITIES

2.2.1 Optical Recycling Centre (Practices only)

The Applicant must demonstrate that they are utilising the most comprehensive optical plastic recycling service available to them, covering all plastic items that they sell from their premises if possible.

2.2.2 Support for Climate Action Projects

The Applicant must demonstrate an ongoing commitment to supporting climate action projects, such as Gold Standard projects, that can be financed through the purchase of a credits per tCO₂e, to level at least equivalent to their total annual emissions for the most recent reporting year.

3. REQUIREMENTS FOR AUDITING AND ISSUING OF A CERTIFICATE

Eligibility for Net Zero Active certification must be assessed by a Net Zero Eyecare Approved Auditor. The Approved Auditor will, over the course of an audit conducted in-person or via video-call, ascertain whether, by the end of the audit process, the Applicant meets the criteria necessary for Net Zero Eyecare - Net Zero Carbon certification.

3.1 Application for Audit

The applicant must submit a Net Zero Eyecare Application form, citing for which certification they are applying, confirming that they have completed the required preparatory activities, and accepting Net Zero Eyecare's terms & conditions.

3.2 The Audit Process

The Applicant must undergo an audit conducted by a Net Zero Eyecare Approved Auditor.

The Auditor will conduct an audit in-person or via video-call, so as to physically or virtually view any and all required documents or data.

All verifiable data such as the applicant's energy supplier and usage, number of items bought/sold, or annual emails sent, must be verified by the applicant showing the relevant data to the Auditor.

Calculations to convert activities into CO₂e will be checked methodologically by the Auditor.

If any items included in the Criteria for Certification are deemed "not applicable" by the Applicant, the reason why those criteria are not applicable must be explained by the Applicant.

The breakdown of the applicant's total carbon footprint will be covered during the course of the audit, and the monthly offsetting payment rate will be agreed by the end of the audit.

The Auditor will produce an audit report.

The Applicant will formally accept the audit report, after which the Auditor will send the audit report to the certification body (Net Zero Eyecare).

3.3 Issuing of Certification

The certification body will review the audit report and advise on the conformity of the application.

Except in cases of non-conformity, the certification body will issue the appropriate Net Zero Eyecare certificate(s) for the company and site(s) included in the audit which will be valid for 12 months.

3.4 Renewal of Certification

For the certification to remain valid, the annual audit must be booked prior to the anniversary of the date of certification, and must be conducted within one calendar month of the anniversary.

4. GUIDANCE ON NON-CONFORMITIES

4.1 Carbon Accounting

4.1.1 Minor Non-Conformities in Carbon Accounting

A minor non-conformity occurs when a requirement outlined in the relevant Net Zero Eyecare standard is not met, but without significantly impacting the eligibility of the application. Some examples of minor non-conformities, and recommended actions, are given below:

Non-Conformity

Failure to provide accurate data for an item included within one of the Scopes/Categories of carbon accounting, or incorrectly assigning an item as not-applicable, when an accurate figure can be obtained quickly and easily so as not to substantially interrupt the audit process.

Recommended Action

Relevant data is obtained by the Applicant, checked by the Auditor, and integrated into the audit process.

Non-Conformity

Inability or refusal to provide data for an item within one of the Scopes/Categories of carbon accounting, such as emails sent per annum or business travel per annum.

Recommended Action

An likely figure is agreed between the Auditor and Applicant to function in place of accurate data, and then the Net Gain principle is heavily applied to assign a carbon footprint to that activity that covers the actual carbon footprint well beyond reasonable doubt.

eg. Number of emails sent per annum is not known. An email is assumed to have a carbon footprint of 0.003gCO₂e, and it is realistic to assume that the Applicant does not send more than 5000 emails per year, giving a “likely” carbon footprint of 15g of CO₂e per annum. 0.5tCO₂e is actually added to the Applicant’s annual carbon budget to cover the discrepancy in hard data.

The above process is reported fully in the audit report, and it is recommended that accounting systems are put in place to facilitate the provision of a more accurate figure for the following audit.

Non-Conformity

The Applicant uses a source other than those approved in this standard for greenhouse gas coefficients used in their carbon accounting.

Recommended Action

The source used is reviewed by the Auditor; whether the source is suitably credible or not is decided at the Auditor’s discretion. If the source is accepted, it must be declared in the audit report.

If the source is deemed insufficiently credible, but the core activity data for the Applicant’s carbon accounting is available, the Auditor may request that the Applicant re-do their carbon footprint calculations using coefficients from an approved source.

4.1.2 Major Non-Conformities in Carbon Accounting

A major non-conformity occurs when there is serious deviation from the criteria for certification, significantly impacting the eligibility of the application, or breach of the Net Zero Eyecare terms and conditions, or other activity that threatens the reputation or integrity of Net Zero Eyecare by association.

Some examples of major non-conformities, and recommended actions, are given below:

Non-Conformity

Refusal to provide data for an applicable item within one of the Scopes of carbon accounting, or to agree an alternative proxy figure to use in their carbon budget.

Recommended Action

If the participant is not willing to abide by the criteria for certification, they are ineligible for certification. The audit process is terminated, and existing certification revoked until such time that the Applicant is willing and able to meet the necessary criteria.

Non-Conformity

Omission of a source of greenhouse emissions, resultant from the Applicant's business activity, that falls within the conventional Scopes of carbon accounting outlined in this standard.

Recommended Action

Regardless of whether the omission can be considered intentional or accidental, the auditing process will be paused and any active certification suspended until such time that an appropriate audit can be conducted including accurate and sufficient data on the omitted activity. Certification can be again be sought / reinstated when the omitted activity has been fully included in the Applicant's carbon accounting.

Non-Conformity

The Applicant is found to have falsified data in their carbon accounting, resulting in an inaccurate carbon footprint. This is not the same as simply making errors in the accounting or conversion process; to falsify data is intentional and duplicitous.

Recommended Action

The audit process will be paused and any active certifications suspended. The credibility and integrity of the Applicant must be reviewed by the Auditor and Net Zero Eyecare, and the decision made as to whether the Applicant is welcome to apply for a Net Zero Eyecare certification at all. The Applicant may be suspended from submitting applications for a period of time, and any active NZE certifications revoked.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS OF NON-COMPULSORY BEST PRACTICE

5.1 Make Sustainability Affordable

An applicant may wish to make their certification - and any other actions in sustainability - more affordable by adjusting their pricing to cover the anticipated costs of certification, renewable energy, carbon credits, etc.

Some may choose to implement a functional 'levy' on the sale of certain items in order to generate revenue to sit in a certain 'pot' allocated to climate action or other sustainability initiatives.

5.2 Team Engagement

There are multiple benefits to companies that fully integrate a culture of sustainability into their business practice. Carbon accounting can be made easier by welcoming insights from diverse team members with specialist knowledge of certain areas of the business. Devising and implementing a reduction plan can be more efficient if the task of identifying reductions opportunities is delegated throughout a workforce.

Even more powerful can be the additional delegation of a Sustainability Officer tasked with monitoring the sustainability practices of a business, and collating the necessary data for annual audits.

This is not to mention the notable positive impacts to team cohesion, and individual autonomy, wellbeing, and sense of impact, that results from making all team members a part of a company's overall sustainability mission.

5.3 Avoid Greenwashing

The concept of greenwashing threatens the integrity and credibility of any certification body, including Net Zero Eyecare, and any certified company. Therefore, we offer the following advice to help and certified company avoid potential greenwashing:

- Speak with humility. One of the most respectable stances in organisation can presently take is "We're not perfect but we're doing our best while striving to get better".
- Be proud of your achievements, such as certification, but don't over-inflate your claims or pretend that you're beyond room for improvement - even if the means to improve aren't presently available to you.
- Pursue transparency with every claim you make, eg. publish your audit report so that it is available to download from a "Sustainability" page on your website.
- Proudly display your Net Zero Eyecare certificates and certification badges while you have an active certification. Every item that Net Zero Eyecare provides you as a means to demonstrate your certifications includes your unique certificate number, allowing interested parties to verify your certification on the netzeroeyecare.org website.
- Do not imply that because you have achieved Net Zero Eyecare certification, or indeed undertaken any other action to be more sustainable, that your business or products are now "sustainable". Terms such as "sustainable", "eco-friendly" and "net zero" should be used with great care and with respect to relevant geographical regulations (such as the EU's ECGT).
- State clearly that, by supporting Climate Action projects, you are "taking responsibility for ongoing emissions" and avoid using terms like "carbon neutral" or "carbon negative", which can be misleading. Always contextualise your support of climate action projects as a part of your wider Net Zero strategy which is based around annual reporting and reductions.

5.4 Patient Engagement & Travel Survey

Emissions from patient travel is a required inclusion in the Net Zero Eyecare Net Zero Carbon certification standard for practices, but it's not often data that's readily available. To get the most accurate representation of patient travel emissions relatively quickly and easily, you need to collect data on i) distance travelled during a round-trip from a patient's home and the practice, and ii) the type of vehicle/engine used for travel (conversion factors are available from BEIS on the different types of transport commonly used in the UK, eg. petrol engine cars, diesel engine cars, battery EV's, bus, rail, etc.).

To collect this data we recommend running a Patient Travel Survey, asking the two questions mentioned above to patients as they enter the practice, for a minimum period of two weeks of "normal" practice activity. The longer the sample period the better, and if the survey can be split throughout the year to account for seasonal variation, even better still.

