

How to Obtain a SON Conformity Assessment Programme (SONCAP) Certificate in Nigeria

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Description

Introduction

The **SON Conformity Assessment Programme (SONCAP)** is one of the most important regulatory requirements for businesses importing products into Nigeria. Administered by the Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), the scheme ensures that regulated goods entering the Nigerian market comply with approved safety and quality standards.

For importers, manufacturers, logistics companies, and regulatory professionals, understanding how to obtain a SONCAP Certificate is essential because the certificate is a mandatory document for customs clearance of regulated imports.

This guide provides a clear, professionally written, and explanation of:

- What SONCAP is and why it exists
- The complete process for obtaining a SONCAP Certificate in Nigeria
- Official requirements and documentation

- Certification routes and timelines
- Costs published by the issuing authority (SON)
- Common mistakes and misconceptions
- Frequently asked questions (curated from common search queries)

All information in this article is based on details published by the **Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON)**, the government agency issuing and regulating SONCAP certification.

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What Is the SON Conformity Assessment Programme (SONCAP)?

The SON Conformity Assessment Programme (SONCAP) is a pre-shipment verification system designed to ensure that imported products conform to Nigerian standards before they arrive in the country.

The programme operates as an **offshore conformity assessment system**, meaning that product verification, inspection, and testing are carried out in the exporting country through SON-approved Independent Accredited Firms (IAFs).

Core Objectives of SONCAP

According to SON, the programme was introduced to:

- Prevent the importation of substandard or unsafe products
- Ensure imported goods meet Nigerian Industrial Standards (NIS) or approved international standards

- Protect consumers and the environment
- Facilitate smoother customs clearance procedures for compliant goods

In practical terms, SONCAP acts as a regulatory filter, ensuring that only compliant products enter the Nigerian market.

Why the SONCAP Certificate Is Mandatory in Nigeria

A SONCAP Certificate is required for the clearance of regulated products at Nigerian ports. SON makes it clear that certification must be completed before shipment leaves the exporting country.

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Key Regulatory Implications

Without a SONCAP Certificate:

- Customs clearance may be denied or delayed
- Importers may face default charges or penalties
- Goods may be subjected to enforcement actions

SON further specifies that SONCAP certification cannot be obtained after shipment has already departed from the exporting country.

Key Documents Within the SONCAP Framework

The SONCAP system involves more than one certificate. Understanding the relationship between these documents is essential for a smooth process.

SONCAP Certification Documents

Document	Purpose	Issued By
Product Certificate (PC)	Confirms the compliance status of the product	Independent Accredited Firm
Certificate of Conformity (CoC)	Confirms shipment compliance after inspection/testing	Independent Accredited Firm
SONCAP Certificate (SC)	Required for customs clearance in Nigeria	Standards Organisation of Nigeria

Each stage builds upon the previous one, forming a structured compliance pathway.

SONCAP Certification Routes

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SON has established three certification routes depending on product compliance history and manufacturer reliability.

Route A: Unregistered Product (PC1)

Route A is designed for:

- New products
- First-time exporters
- Occasional or one-off shipments

Under this route:

- Inspection and testing are required for each shipment
- The certificate applies only to that specific consignment

Route B: Registered Product (PC2)

Route B applies to manufacturers that demonstrate consistent compliance.

Key features include:

- Product registration validity of one year
- Reduced frequency of testing and inspection
- Easier processing for repeat shipments

Route C: Licensed Product (PC3)

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Route C is intended for manufacturers with a strong history of compliance and quality assurance systems.

Benefits include:

- One-year certification validity
- Minimal inspection requirements
- Streamlined process for ongoing shipments

Step-by-Step Process: How to Obtain a SONCAP Certificate in Nigeria

Below is the official process flow, presented in a clear and practical sequence suitable for importers and compliance professionals.

Step 1: Determine Product Eligibility

The importer must first confirm whether the product falls under SON-regulated categories requiring SONCAP certification.

Only regulated products require SONCAP certification; exempt products follow a separate approval route.

Step 2: Select an Independent Accredited Firm (IAF)

SON authorises accredited firms in exporting countries to perform conformity assessment activities, including:

- Product inspection
- Laboratory testing
- Sampling
- Document review

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The exporter or manufacturer typically coordinates with the chosen IAF.

Step 3: Apply for a Product Certificate (PC)

The importer or exporter applies for the appropriate Product Certificate based on the selected route:

Route	Certificate Type	Validity
Route A	PC1	Single shipment
Route B	PC2	12 months
Route C	PC3	12 months

Step 4: Product Testing and Inspection

Compliance verification may include:

- Physical product inspection before shipment
- Sampling and laboratory testing
- Production process audits
- Review of technical documentation

Testing is conducted in accordance with recognised testing standards, including ISO-approved laboratory practices.

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Step 5: Issuance of Certificate of Conformity (CoC)

Where products satisfy inspection and testing requirements, the IAF issues a Certificate of Conformity (CoC). This document confirms that the shipment complies with applicable standards.

Step 6: Issuance of SONCAP Certificate

Upon receipt of the CoC, SON issues the SONCAP Certificate.

Important note:

- A SONCAP Certificate applies to only one PAAR consignment.

Step 7: Customs Clearance in Nigeria

The SONCAP Certificate is submitted as part of import documentation during:

- Form M processing

- PAAR processing
- Nigeria Customs Service clearance procedures

Official SONCAP Costs (2026))

Below are administrative fees published by SON for SONCAP processing.

Product Certificate Fees

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Certificate Type	Cost (USD)
PC1 – Unregistered Product	$500
PC2 – Registered Product	$1,000
PC3 – Licensed Product	$2,000
New Product Addition	$350
Amendment	$100
Non-Conformity Report	$350

SONCAP Certificate Fee

Item	Cost
SONCAP Certificate	$350

Note: Inspection and testing charges may vary depending on product type and accredited service providers.

Processing Timelines

SON indicates the following processing timelines when complete documentation is provided:

Certificate	Estimated Processing Time

Product Certificate	Up to 96 hours (may be issued within 24 hours)
SONCAP Certificate	Up to 96 hours (may be issued within 24 hours)

Key Requirements for SONCAP Certification

Although document requirements may vary based on product type, SON's process generally requires:

- Product test reports
- Technical product specifications
- Manufacturer details
- Inspection reports
- Commercial invoice
- Shipping documents
- Product Certificate (PC)
- Certificate of Conformity (CoC)

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Penalties for Non-Compliance

SON clearly states that SONCAP cannot be processed after shipment departure. Failure to comply may attract:

- A default charge of **20% of CIF value**, or

- A minimum penalty of **₦2,000,000**, whichever is higher.

SONCAP Certificate vs SONCAP Import Permit

A common area of confusion is the difference between SONCAP certification and SONCAP Import Permit.

SONCAP Certificate	SONCAP Import Permit
Required for regulated imports	Used for exempted imports
Pre-shipment conformity assessment	Exemption mechanism
Mandatory for commercial finished goods	Applies to raw materials, machinery, or related categories

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Common Misconceptions About SONCAP

Misconception 1: SONCAP can be processed after shipment

Incorrect. SONCAP must be completed before shipment leaves the exporting country.

Misconception 2: One certificate covers multiple shipments

Incorrect. Each SONCAP Certificate covers only one shipment.

Misconception 3: SONCAP is optional for quality products

Incorrect. Compliance is mandatory for regulated imports regardless of product reputation or origin.

Frequently Asked Questions (People Also Ask)

How long does it take to obtain SONCAP certification?

Processing generally takes up to 96 hours, and may be completed within 24 hours where documentation is complete.

How much does SONCAP certification cost?

The official SONCAP Certificate fee is $350, excluding testing and inspection costs.

Is SONCAP required for all imported goods?

No. It applies only to regulated products under SON standards.

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What happens if products fail conformity inspection?

A Non-Conformity Report may be issued, and certification will not proceed until compliance is achieved.

Can importers handle SONCAP without the manufacturer?

Since conformity assessment takes place offshore, coordination with the manufacturer or exporter is usually necessary.

Best Practices for Successful SONCAP Certification

For smooth processing and minimal delays:

1. Begin SONCAP processing before shipment planning.
2. Work with manufacturers familiar with SONCAP requirements.
3. Maintain accurate and complete documentation.
4. Choose the appropriate certification route based on shipment frequency.

5. Avoid shipping products before certification is completed.

Conclusion

The SON Conformity Assessment Programme (SONCAP) remains a critical compliance requirement for importation into Nigeria. By ensuring that goods are inspected and certified before shipment, the programme protects consumers, supports fair trade practices, and promotes adherence to quality standards.

For importers and businesses, understanding the official process; from product certification to SONCAP issuance, is essential for avoiding penalties and achieving seamless customs clearance.

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When handled correctly, SONCAP certification becomes a predictable and efficient part of the import process rather than a regulatory obstacle.

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