

Sustainable Golf Facility Program FAQ's

Q: Who is Audubon Lifestyles, and are they affiliated with any other Audubon Society?

A: Audubon Lifestyles is an independent non-profit organization, and is not affiliated with any other Audubon society or organization. Operating with the main purpose of benefiting society, Audubon Lifestyles delivers and promotes sustainable programming, services and certifications that are cost effective and reduce risk. Our goal is to link together individuals, businesses, universities, communities and other non-profit organizations to create a unified team approach to foster and promote the concepts associated with sustainability. Audubon Lifestyles was founded upon the International Sustainability Council's Principles for Sustainability, and believes that the most natural way to achieve success, and to foster sustainability is by working to balance the triple bottom line of people, profit, and planet.

Q: Is Audubon Lifestyles part of the Golf Course industry and why should that make a difference?

A: No, Audubon Lifestyles is an independent not-for-profit organization that was created to advocate sustainable living and lifestyles. We implement our mission through various programs that we have created and offer to anyone that is interested in becoming more economically, environmentally and socially sustainable. Some of our programs have also been created under the review of another independent not-for-profit organization called The International Sustainability Council (ISC). The ISC is a "Think Tank comprised of a Board of nearly 25 people who are associated with various universities, businesses, not-for-profit organizations and governments. The ISC operates under the banner of the ISC Principles of Sustainability and as such has reviewed, commented on and ultimately endorsed a number of the Audubon Lifestyles programs. So...Audubon Lifestyles is not a part of the golf course industry, but has further subjected our programs to scrutiny by an additional not-for-profit organization that is a world leader in sustainability.

We believe that this is important for a number of reasons. First is the issue of transparency and the fact that Audubon Lifestyles doesn't work in a vacuum or act in ways that are self serving. Secondly, when Audubon Lifestyles grants certification, that recognition is not coming from within the industry being certified. We think that this is extremely important to the credibility of the certification. Why would anyone want a certification from an entity that is part of the same industry being certified? We think this is sort of like having the "fox guarding the chicken coop." The public and governmental regulators are looking for brands that they can trust and we believe having certification from an entity that was created to facilitate sustainability and that is not directly connected with the golf industry (for example) is much better for the golf industry and for the sustainability movement in general.

For More Information

Audubon Lifestyles

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Q. How is this program different from other golf certification programs?

A: Most existing certification programs focus primarily on water and wildlife, but do not capture the social and economic values associated with managing a truly sustainable golf facility. The Audubon Lifestyles Sustainable Golf Facility Program fills the gap between environmental certification programs and what it means to be truly sustainable. The Audubon Lifestyles Sustainable Golf Facility Program should be seen as a complement to environmental certification programs, and can even be seen as a logical next step for golf facilities that have already been certified by credible third-party organizations. Through the program audit, facilities that are certified by credible third-party organizations receive credit and extra points towards their Audubon Lifestyles sustainability rating. That said, being certified in an environmental certification program is not a requirement to participate in the Audubon Lifestyles Sustainable Golf Facility Program.

Q. Do you have to have all of the requirements met in order to join the program?

A. No. Part of the benefit of joining the Audubon Lifestyles Sustainable Golf Facility Program is the assistance that your facility will receive from Audubon Lifestyles staff as you work through the requirements of certification. Among other things this includes assistance with filling out the Program Audit, producing a Sustainability Charter, and developing a Natural Resource Inventory.

Q. How difficult is the program?

A. The program was developed in such a way as to be achievable yet comprehensive to most golf facilities. However, facilities that achieve a higher standard in sustainability are rewarded through a higher level of recognition and branding opportunities, and have the opportunity to earn the ISC Seal of Sustainability.

Q. I see a number of organizations and individuals associated with the creation of the program. Who should I turn to if I need assistance?

A. The program is administered in its entirety by Audubon Lifestyles, Inc. a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the principles of sustainability to individuals, businesses, municipalities and organizations around the world. If you need any assistance whatsoever you should call 727-733-0762 or email info@audubonlifestyles.org.

Q. What are the costs associated with the Program?

A. There is a one-time registering fee of \$500 to join the program. After which the facility must maintain an annual \$100 membership fee to retain any designations earned through the program, and to remain in the program. Audubon Lifestyles Platinum Level Membership is included as part of the registration process, and benefits of Platinum Membership can be used in addition to any additional designation earned through the program.

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Q. When I join the program do I get anything right from the start that I can use for branding/marketing?

A. Immediately upon joining you have the right use the Audubon Lifestyles logo, the International Sustainability Council logo, and the Audubon Lifestyles Platinum Member Logo. These logos can be used on marketing materials, on the web or on signs at the facility itself. In addition, a profile page and web link to your facility will be added to the Audubon Network, and viewable to any Audubon Lifestyles website visitor.

Q. When can I use the ISC Charter Member Logo?

A. Immediately after you post the Sustainability Charter on your website or in a publicly viewable location at your facility you earn the right to use the ISC Charter Member Logo, and will be listed on the ISC website as an ISC Charter Member.

Q. What is a Sustainability Charter, and how difficult is it for me to create one?

A. A Sustainability Charter is a public declaration of specific actions that your golf facility pledges to take to be more sustainable. A Sustainability Charter is an adaptation and adoption of the International Sustainability Council's Principles for Sustainability. When you join the Audubon Lifestyles Sustainable Golf Facility Program we can provide your facility with a Sustainability Charter template that makes creating your own Charter a very simple, educational, and easy step in the process.

Q. Is an on-site visit required to verify the Audit?

A. Although we highly encourage an on-site verification visit from an Audubon Lifestyles representative or third party verifier, it is not a requirement. One of the challenges that face businesses everywhere (especially in our current economic environment) is lack of financial support. In many cases it may be impossible for a facility to cover the costs associated with an on-site visit, and therefore it is not required.

Q. What are the benefits of having an on-site verification visit?

A. Facilities that choose to have on-site verification are rewarded with more opportunities to earn additional points during the Program Audit phase of the program, thus making earning the ISC Seal of Sustainability and a Five-Star Rating more attainable. Additionally, higher points for similar criteria are awarded to facilities for "better" forms of verification, with on-site verification viewed as being the "best". The program has been set up this way as a means to encourage and incentivize better forms of verification. Visiting a property first-hand allows our staff to fully visualize the facility, and therefore we are better able to educate facility managers and owners about sustainability, and the specific aspects of the facility that could be improved to increase you overall audit score. Additionally, because we are physically there on-site, the time, burden, and cost of providing all the other forms of verification (photos, documents, maps, brochures etc.) via email/postal is greatly reduced.

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Q. What are the costs associated with an on-site verification visit, how long should I plan ahead, and how long will a visit take?

A. An on-site visit typically lasts 4 hours, and would consist of a site tour, and an audit interview process. A site visit fee of \$500 per day, and all travel related expenses are billed to the facility. To keep travel expenses at a minimum it is advised to plan at least a month in advance, although a site-visit may occur quicker if a verifier is available.

Q. If we choose to not have an on-site audit how do we verify aspects of the audit?

A. Specific line items in the Audit have a number of different options for verification. Higher points are generally granted for “better” forms of verification. In order to earn points associated with a specific item you need to provide one method of verification. Photos, images, documents, and maps can be sent via email or in hardcopy format. Verbal verifications are conducted during a phone interview process after the audit has been submitted to Audubon Lifestyles.

Q. Does providing multiple forms of verification increase our point’s total?

A. No. The facility can only earn point(s) for one verification method for any given line item in the audit. Verification points do not accumulate for the same line item.

Q. How long does a phone interview process typically take?

A. It depends on how many verbal verification points are being sought after, but generally the exit interview process should take about an hour.

Q. In order to maintain designations earned do we have to resubmit anything next year or the year after?

A. A facility must resubmit the program audit every three years, and have a phone interview or on-site verification to maintain the designations earned through the program.

Q. After our facility has completed the Program Audit and awarded a score, and earned specific designations from Audubon Lifestyles, can our facility increase our score and raise to a higher “star” rating next year?

A. Absolutely. The program has been set up as a means to assist, and encourage facilities to do just that. Anytime the facility is ready to “raise the bar” we are ready too!

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