

The World Free Zones Organization launches Safe Zone, a new global certification standard to ensure compliance with international standards in safety and security

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Officially launching globally yesterday, the World Free Zones Organization (World FZO) has designed its Safe Zone certification program around the OECD’s Code of Conduct for Clean Free Trade Zones and combines internationally-vetted third party site inspections with governance tools locally compatible with the World Customs Organization’s Authorized Economic Operator status.

Free zones are designed to facilitate the global flow of goods and services by offering simplified customs and compliance procedures to businesses operating within them. Free zones channel a quarter of annual global trade and employ almost 70 million people worldwide. With illicit trade affecting over 15% of global GDP, the need to keep such business out of free zones is more important than ever.

Working in collaboration with border solutions specialists KGH Global Consulting, the World FZO has developed a complete solution for free zones to ensure clean trade flows through their channels. The Safe Zone program is the result of several sustained discussions with the OECD Task Force on Countering Illicit Trade (TF-CIT) over the last two years. This led to the adoption of the OECD Code of Conduct for Clean Free Trade Zones as the backbone of the Safe Zone program.

Beyond clean trade, Safe Zone provides a solid framework for free zones to implement transparent governance tools that comply with broader international standards from the World Trade Organization and the World Customs Organization. These tools will improve free zone operations in areas of product safety, personnel training, and trade monitoring.

Dr. Mohammed Alzarooni, Chairman of the World FZO, explained that “Safe Zone is a symbol, a signal to the business community that a free zone operates in complete compliance with international laws and regulations.” He added that Safe Zone certification would unlock many advantages for certified zones, including the possibility of applying to their local Customs office for Authorized Economic Operator status.

The Safe Zone certification process begins with an online application on the dedicated microsite www.certificationshub.com, built and managed by the World FZO. Approved applications lead to an online assessment conducted through a detailed survey of the candidate zone’s procedures and systems. This is then inspected on site by an internationally-vetted third party and leads to either a confirmed Safe Zone status valid for one year, or to a temporary candidate status with a roadmap to fill identified gaps until the next inspection. Certified zones must renew their status yearly to keep their Safe Zone credentials.

A pilot program has been successfully conducted in five zones: Le Freeport in Luxembourg, Bogota Free Zone in Colombia, Dubai Airport Free Zone in the UAE, Klaipeda Free Economic Zone

Management Company in Lithuania, and El Consorci Zona Franca Barcelona in Spain. Based upon this successful trial run, the Safe Zone program is now rolling out globally.

Dr. Alzarooni added that “the whistle-blower system we have also put in place on the Safe Zone microsite will allow anonymous parties to report violations of the OECD Code of Conduct in any certified free zone.” Additional features will be added as the need arises, based on market demand and partner feedback. By combining voluntary compliance procedures with transparency tools and enhanced governance practices, the Safe Zone program will usher in a new era of clean trade in free zones around the world.

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About the World FZO

The World Free Zones Organization (World FZO) is a global not-for-profit organization that provides one authoritative, collective voice representing the interests of free zones around the world. Registered in Geneva, Switzerland, and headquartered in Dubai, UAE, since 2014, the World FZO aims to enhance free zones’ global contribution to economic prosperity and social development by fostering best practices, sharing industry knowledge and supporting clean trade policies through standardized regulation, globally recognized certification programs, and solid compliance models amongst its more than 600 members in over 125 countries.

www.worldfzo.org

Press contact

Tim Heath

Marketing and Communications Manager

Phone: +971 4 204 5471

Mobile: +971 50 2950173

eMail: tim.heath@worldfzo.org