

AISC Certification—Qualified Random Audits

BY DAN KAUFMAN

Qualified random audits will strengthen the AISC Certification program, benefiting certified companies and the entire construction industry.

DURING THE PAST YEAR, several Quality Corner articles have focused on changes to the AISC Certification program. These changes have ranged from general schedule requirements in becoming certified to procedures for dealing with fraudulent activity, allegations, and complaints. Regardless of the details of the change, the overriding goal has remained the same: to strengthen the overall program for both the participants and those in the construction industry who specify AISC Certification.

In his April 2010 Quality Corner and his opening remarks at NASCC: The Steel Conference in Orlando, AISC president Roger Ferch obviously had this goal in mind when he announced that AISC Certification will begin moving forward with Qualified Random Audits for our certified participants. This article will help explain the facets of a Qualified Random Audit, the criteria used to determine the participant pool, and how you can provide feedback.

AISC Certification reached out to the steel construction industry and asked, “What can we do to make our program better? How can we increase the reliability of the certification program?” The overriding response was the suggestion to conduct random audits. AISC and QMC considered this, and felt it would be a valuable addition to our program. This could help address concerns about participants that might not be following their quality management systems consistently throughout the year. The idea of surprise or random audits has been around since the concept of auditing quality management systems began. A variety of certification programs use this method to verify whether an individual

or company is meeting its specific program requirements throughout the year.

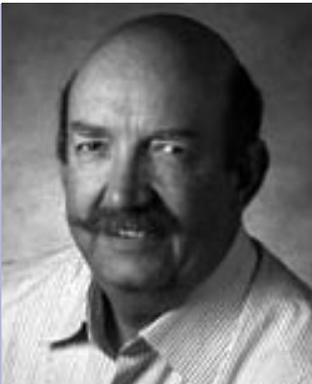
“Qualified” and “random” may seem like contradictory words but they describe two vital elements of AISC Certification’s new program. There are participants in the certification program that leave no doubt as to their consistency. If your company is strictly following its quality management system in accordance with AISC Certification requirements, has excellent customer feedback with no repeating corrective actions or concerns, and is not involved in any allegations or complaints, then the likelihood of being included in the pool is reduced. Including the “better” companies as possible candidates for a random audit would lessen the chance that a company in need of an extra audit would actually get one.

In determining the criteria for selecting participants, we decided that we need to focus our energies on the participants who appear to be only meeting the base-level requirements of our program. The group to be eligible for an extra audit is to be limited by considerations that we feel will be fairly applied across the board. From this qualified group or “pool” we will randomly select participants for an extra audit, in addition to their regularly scheduled audits. The cost of this “random” audit will be borne by the AISC Certification program, not the audited company.

If a company is selected for a random audit, it will be given 48 hours notice that a Quality Management Company auditor will be arriving at its facility to conduct an audit according to its respective certification category. Subject to time constraints, this audit may cover all of the normal requirements of AISC Certification and any possible concerns that we may have from previous audit results or that we have received from customer comments. The results of the random audit will be presented in a format identical to an annual audit, which may include corrective actions, concerns, or even a requirement for a supplemental audit.

The Selection Process

In determining the criteria for participant selection for the random audit pool, we focused on two main evaluations: first, the performance during the administration of the certification process and second, the performance during the onsite audit.



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Quality Corner is a monthly feature that covers topics ranging from how to specify a certified company to how long it takes to become a certified company. If you are interested in browsing our electronic archive, please visit www.aisc.org/QualityCorner.

Each evaluation contains key elements that both AISC and QMC deem essential. The first covers the administrative portion of the certification process and represents the areas where a participant works with AISC-QMC staff. This includes:

- Administration Performance
- Pre-Audit Performance
- Post-Audit Performance
- Continual Improvement
- Customer Feedback
- Cooperation

The second element is the onsite audit, and the areas reviewed by the QMC Auditor, including:

- Management Buy-In
- Staff Buy-In
- Operating Processes
- Communication with Customers
- Follow-up on Concerns and CARs
- Continual Improvement

Obviously, there are different ranges of answers and scenarios for each point listed above, and every company will be different. The goal of AISC and QMC is to systematically rate the two areas separately to determine where the specific company will rank. We will then take participants with scores in the lowest 30% and enter them into the qualified random audit pool. The chosen participants will be notified of how they ranked in terms of the areas which could require improvement. From this pool, we will randomly select a group of participants to be audited.

As an example of how these evaluations will be done, post-audit performance con-

siders the effectiveness of the company's commitment to resolve AISC audit CARs in a timely manner with satisfactory evidence. Figure 1 illustrates a range of response timeliness and completeness.

In the onsite audit observations evaluation of management buy-in can include such things as participation of top management in both the internal and external audit processes; conducting timely and thorough management reviews that drive improvement; establishment of meaningful objectives and effective metrics; and evidence of leadership commitment visible throughout the organization. The range and involvement of executive management can also vary from "fully engaged and understands the return-on-investment from the certification process" to "rarely participates in quality management."

As a final example, continual improvement is essential for a successful company in the eyes of AISC. Does the company identify productivity improvements, quality improvements, and waste reduction to add value for its customers? Figure 2 illustrates the range of approaches to continual improvement.

Your Feedback at Work

AISC Certification welcomes your feedback. Taking your feedback and turning it into program improvements demonstrates our own commitment to quality and continuous improvement.

Early comments heard on the qualified random audit program suggest that certified companies are excited about the con-

cept. I have yet to hear from a company who is worried about a random audit; in fact, several companies have requested that they be included in the random audit pool regardless of their standing with respect to the criteria.

The first pool is being formed during the last half of 2010, and the first qualified random audits will occur in the first quarter of 2011. AISC Certification will be selecting (qualifying) roughly 30% of our certified participants for this pool. We presume that the size of the pool may fluctuate over the next year as we streamline the overall process. An update on the results of this program will be shared with attendees at the next NASCC: The Steel Conference in Pittsburgh, May 11-14, 2011.

If you have comments—positive or negative—about the random audit program, please visit www.aisc.org/certfeedback to let us know what you think. If you have questions about AISC Certification in general, we're here to answer them. Just email certinfo@aisc.org. MSC

Fig. 1: Range of Post-Audit Performance.

Excellent	CARs were effectively addressed and closed out within the allotted time, and no requests for additional information were required.
Average	CARs were addressed in a timely manner but additional satisfactory evidence was required for closure.
Poor	CARs were not adequately resolved within the allowed time.

Fig. 2: Range of Continual Improvement

Excellent	Improvement is monitored and measured. Follow-up is conducted with internal audits. Individual and group training for quality tools is encouraged, supported and implemented.
Average	Identifies and tracks non conformances and CARs for product, process, and system, but a consistent methodology to review results of improvement projects is not evident.
Poor	No evidence of analysis or improvement activity to get to the root cause of recurring problems.