

ON THE SURFACE, writing certification criteria looks like a relatively simple process. A group of volunteers, all of prescribed backgrounds, just have to agree on what criteria are important. Selecting the words to convey criteria should not be difficult. We all speak the same language don't we? The answer is no, we don't, and while we may all want the same goal, namely, a quality structure that meets the design requirements, getting to the goal can take many different paths.

One common path to confusion is highlighted by the use of the acronym QA, which stands for Quality Assurance. The American Society for Quality defines QA as "all the planned and systematic activities implemented within the quality system that can be demonstrated to provide confidence a product or service will fulfill requirements for quality." This can be more easily explained as that part of an organization that plans how quality criteria are going to be attained. The actual inspection is QC, or Quality Control, which means checking to determine if the desired quality has been achieved.

The various departments of transportation (DOTs), and building code officials throughout the United States use

Because human nature isn't going to change soon, there will continue to be people who believe that 100% inspection should be required, especially if there is a fear of being accountable for why a piece, any piece, was not inspected, when it easily could have been. Does this sound like a public project? How will anything less than 100% inspection hold up in court, or in the press?

It needs to be brought up again that engineers design with safety factors. In some cases the project owner specifies the amount of safety factor. The safety factors

principles is not showing an intent to deceive. It's an attempt to "do the right thing."

Now this is not intended to be a condemnation of public officials and agencies, because they are independently trying to meet the needs of their constituencies. They need to retain public confidence or some key heads will roll. They are responsible for the public safety as well as the public *perception* of safety, which is a difficult line to walk. It's made more difficult by shrill undocumented claims of bad quality and those whose interests are served by unfounded fears.

AISC Quality Certification is intended to help improve the entire fabrication and erection industry by requiring adherence to basic quality principles. The AISC criteria require a company to have in its system the backbone of an accepted quality program, including management commitment and review, internal audit, and corrective action. We know it is working because two or three years after a company achieves certification and is finished with "the job they had to have," the certified company is seeing that it is operating better. We are hearing that feedback, and we are hopeful that over time the third-party "QA" inspectors are going to find fewer and fewer defects. MSC