

# INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW

RECENTLY I WAS IN PHOENIX for a conference where I crossed paths with several construction professionals from different parts of the industry, several of whom had questions about AISC Certification. Besides enjoying the Phoenix weather—decidedly better than midwinter in my hometown of Chicago—I also enjoyed reflecting on the interesting overlap in their questions. The answers to some seem self-evident to one group while being totally unknown to another. Each group is interested in different advantages and requirements of AISC certification. What else does Certification bring to the table?

Those are certainly fair questions, but actually there are additional benefits. AISC Certification is seen by many jurisdictions and municipalities as sufficient to waive the special inspection requirements located in *IBC* Chapter 17, which in its 2012 version

defer to Chapter N of the AISC Specification. Additional information on Chapter N can be found at [www.aisc.org/2010spec](http://www.aisc.org/2010spec), or in the *Quality Corner* in the March 2010 issue of *MSC* (available online at [www.modernsteel.com/backissues](http://www.modernsteel.com/backissues)). If they have questions about AISC Certification, you probably do, too; here are some helpful

insights. First, it does not mean that the regular inspections are waived. Rather, it means the fabricator can use in-house personnel to perform the inspections in lieu of an independent third party special inspector, thus saving the additional expense the owner would otherwise incur. The program also shifts risk from the owner (and design professional) to the certified participant and its quality management system (QMS).

Finally, certification offers the owner (and design professional) the ability to have a pool of prequalified bidders for a project. Often owners may be building a project in an area where they do not have a relationship with a specific structural steel fabricator or erector. Certification can help determine that the steel team will have the expected level of quality and will help eliminate from consideration those that do not. The easiest way to find a certified fabricator or erector is to visit [www.aisc.org/certsearch](http://www.aisc.org/certsearch), which happens to be one of the top five most visited pages on the AISC website.

## What is the Difference Between Certification and Special Inspection, and is One More Beneficial?

This question came from a building code official. Where inspection typically deals with only a company's bolting and welding procedures or final product inspection, QMS certification requires a comprehensive administrative review, documentation audit and an on-site audit to evaluate a company's QMS. The program focuses on the entire process of fabrication and erection—which will prevent errors from occurring instead of only inspecting and correcting them after the fact.

Certification requires the company to be accountable for all aspects of its organization, including such items as management responsibility, employee training, material purchasing and handling, and site-specific erection plans. In addition, it requires that these same processes continually improve and evolve each year, so the participant does not remain stagnant but keeps growing, developing and improving.

Even the best and brightest company—regardless of size—can benefit from having its quality procedures reviewed and audited on a regular basis. For additional information on this subject, see “100% Inspection Is Not Quality Assurance” in the January 2010 issue of *MSC*, available at [www.modernsteel.com/qualitycorner](http://www.modernsteel.com/qualitycorner).

### How Long? How Much?

These two questions came from a non-certified participant who was looking to begin the certification process. The time element is generally a function of their current QMS, because every fabricator or erector is different. If the applicant has a healthy and active QMS, then the typical timeframe will be anywhere from 6 to 10 weeks, depending on the number of applicants and ability of scheduling the onsite audit.

A resource that visually oriented readers may find useful is the Certification Process Outline/Flowchart available on the AISC Certification website at

[www.aisc.org/certprocess](http://www.aisc.org/certprocess).

This identifies in a clear and effective graphical presentation all the aspects of certification and their