

Streamlining the Certification Process

BY TODD ALWOOD, LEED AP

New requirements will simplify the overall process for AISC Certification.

THE AISC CERTIFICATION DEPARTMENT receives questions every day on the process of certification, both from those applying to the program for the first time as well as seasoned veterans. Some of these are very general in nature but a lot can be very specific to where one is in the overall process. Some of the most frequently asked questions are:

- How long does it take to become certified?
- What do I need to get started?
- Are there any time limitations throughout the process?
- When do I really need to have my Corrective Action Requests (CARs) closed out?

Previously, AISC Certification had approximate time frames for our tasks and responsibilities, covering things like how quickly we would send out an application, perform a documentation audit, write an audit report, or mail a certificate. But the one variable in the process was the participant! With this installment of Quality Corner, we have outlined the time allowances for the tasks and responsibility of the participant in order to help streamline and codify the certification process. These allowances will help take the guesswork out of the process to not only assist participants but also to help specifiers better understand the program.

Certification Applicants

This is the area where AISC Certification receives the most questions from our applicants and specifiers. To help simplify things, we have outlined three main items that apply to all applicants applying for certification: 1) the application submittal, 2) the Administration Audit, and 3) the Docu-

Certification Applicants	Items Required	Time Allowance
Application Submitted to AISC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application • Payment • Quality system documentation submittal (visit www.qmconline.com for a list of items required) 	Any missing or incomplete items must be supplied within 10 calendar days of submittal or the application process will be terminated.
Applicants participate in quality system Administration Audit by QMC.	Additional information or clarifications that may be requested by QMC to complete the Administration Audit.	If an applicant exceeds a total of 45 calendar days, QMC will terminate the application process.
Applicants participate in quality system Documentation Audit by QMC.	Additional information or clarifications that may be requested by QMC to complete the Documentation Audit.	If an applicant exceeds a total of 60 calendar days, QMC will terminate the application process.

Table 1
Requirements and Time Allowances for New Applicants

mentation Audit. Table 1 helps clarify items required and the associated time allowances.

Application Submitted to AISC is the initial step in starting the application process. Three items are required: 1) application, 2) payment, and 3) the quality system documentation submittal. These three items must be submitted within 10 days of each other. If they are not, whatever was submitted will be returned to the sender.

This requirement was introduced to encourage new applicants to have all their documents in order before beginning the process. We also realize that some applicants will tell clients they are in the “process of certification” but only submit an application and nothing else. This requirement will certainly weed those applicants out of the program and allow us to focus our resources.

Once these three items are received, AISC enters the applicant into the certification database and assigns a unique identification number. That number is used on all subse-



Todd Alwood, LEED AP, is the manager for certification business development with AISC. He can be reached at alwood@aisc.org.

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.

quent communication with AISC and Quality Management Company (QMC), an independent, third-party auditing company. At this point, AISC submits the applicant's documentation to QMC to begin the auditing process.

The next step is the **Administration Audit** carried out by QMC, which reviews an applicant's Quality System Submittal and confirms it includes:

- AISC Certification Application
- Job/Position Descriptions
- WPS and Welder Qualifications
- Quality Manual and Procedures
- Internal Audit
- Record of a Management Review Meeting

If items are missing, the applicant is notified and must submit the missing items. If an applicant exceeds 45 calendar days from the beginning of the Administration Audit, QMC terminates the application process and returns the submitted documentation.

The third step is the **Documentation Audit** where the specific pieces of the Quality System Submittal are reviewed in detail against our defined program requirements. Some items are commonly overlooked. For example, calibration requirements state that the paint dry-film thickness gage needs to be checked on a daily basis—yet this is frequently missed. Another common example is not defining the time interval within which you audit a vendor's quality and delivery qualifications.

The applicant has a total of 60 calendar days from the beginning of this audit to close out any additional information or clarification requests. One of the most common issues that applicants run into is not including bolting procedures. One may think they don't need to include these procedures, because their company does not bolt—but the procedures must still be addressed. If an applicant exceeds the 60-day limit, QMC terminates the application process and returns the submitted documentation.

All Participants

Table 2 identifies two items that apply to all participants in AISC Certification, both new applicants and those previously certified. The first highlights the confirmation required with regard to the onsite audit, which must be confirmed within five calendar days from the notice of the audit date by QMC.

The second item is regarding the time allowance for participants to respond to Corrective Action Requests found during an onsite audit. All responses and evidence must be submitted to and closed out by QMC within 45 calendar days from the conclusion of the onsite audit. This means that waiting until day 43 is probably not the wisest thing to do, because QMC must review any outstanding CARs. If additional information is required, you could easily extend beyond the 45 days and be required to reapply for certification.

All Participants	Time Allowance
Companies confirm the scheduled date of onsite audit.	Confirm the QMC scheduled onsite audit date within 5 calendar days.
Companies respond to any QMC Corrective Action Requests (CARs) issued during the onsite audit.	45 calendar days from conclusion of the onsite audit, all CAR responses/evidence must be submitted and CARs closed.

Table 2
Requirements and Time Allowances for All Participants

Onsite Revisits

Additional onsite revisits may be required to verify the implementation and effectiveness of the CARs issued. The most common examples where QMC will deem a revisit is required are: if a participant accrues a significant number of CARs, a participant receives repeat CARs/Concerns, or in some cases the close-out of certain CARs which cannot be followed up through paperwork or additional submittals.

In all cases, the participant has 60 calendar days in which to schedule and complete the onsite revisit. If the revisit is not completed within the given timeframe, the participant is required to reapply for certification.

As Required
On-Site Revisit: If QMC determines that any of the CARs require an auditor to revisit the client, a special audit must be arranged and completed, and the CARs closed out during the special audit prior to the issuance of AISC Certification. The client is responsible for the additional cost of the special audit. A special audit must be scheduled and completed within 60 calendar days from the QMC notice of a required Revisit.

Table 3
Onsite Revisit Requirements and Time Allowance

These items sound simple but we run into questions every day on all of these requirements and allowances—and we realized that they needed to be better defined for our program participants and users. By streamlining the overall process, AISC Certification hopes to increase the transparency of the program and better educate the industry on its benefits.

One additional 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. This identifies all the aspects of certification and their approximate timeframes in a clear and effective graphical presentation. As always, if you have additional questions or comments, I would encourage you to contact AISC Certification at certinfo@aisc.org.

MSC