Documented Procedures Make Projects Better

Documented procedures help AISC Certified Fabricators build quality into their projects.

By Dan Kaufman

In the construction industry, we rely on two very different means of ensuring project quality: inspection and contractor certification. Certification stresses the importance of processes and procedures over inspection, with the belief that if the right procedures are in place, there is a better chance of producing a high-quality end product. This distinction is of particular importance for our industry, where every project is different. Even in industries where thousands of purportedly identical widgets are being produced, manufacturers are finding that inspection alone does not make them high-quality producers.

Of course, we are often asked, “Which is better—certification or inspection?” The answer is that given the inherent differences between the two, one cannot serve as a replacement for the other. In fact, they can complement each other depending on the project requirements.

AISC’s Certification Standard for Steel Building Structures requires participating fabricators to have nearly 20 procedures in place, including contract review, detailing, document control, welding, inspection, calibration, control of nonconformances, and corrective action. They are intended to be a direct reflection of a fabricator’s operations—the types of projects they work on, the size of their shop, etc. No two shops are alike, and consequently no two procedures are alike. On-site auditors review these procedures and through the audit process verify they are being implemented.

So what does a procedure look like? And what purpose does it serve? We’ve put together a sample procedure (at right) and provided some insight and “translations” to help you understand what is being measured the same way as everyone else.

Calibrations don’t last forever.

How much accuracy is required for gages? Determining the gage accuracy level shows that consideration has been given for projects that require cumulative tolerances—especially for extended lengths.

Quality Corner

What does a procedure look like?

Take a look at this sample.

Who is responsible for making sure the procedure is implemented and effective? Accountability makes a difference!

One of approximately 18 procedures required for certification to the Standard for Steel Building Structures.

How do you know that the job you’re doing will have the same quality (in measurements) from one project to the next? Repeatability is essential. A procedure assures that your dimensional measurements have the same repeatability from project to project. As a specifier, you can rely on the accuracy of the work without sending in an inspector.

Standards are important. You want to know that you are measuring the same way as everyone else.

It may seem like a lot of work, but remember the alternative is having a piece delivered to the site and then finding out the holes are off by a half inch.

How good is good enough?

Is it documented? How can you verify that the gage was checked? The procedure requires that a person be assigned to this step to assure that the task is completed. Tasks typically have decisions, measurements, or results of an event—therefore a record is required.

How old is this procedure? How much time has passed since it was updated?

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