

Taking a Pass on Waivers

BY BRIAN RAFF

AISC Certification's "No More Waivers!" program is setting out to live up to its name, and improved communication in the steel industry is the key.

MANAGING THE "NO MORE WAIVERS!" PROGRAM HAS BEEN AN INTERESTING AND CHALLENGING EXPERIENCE OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS.

As an engineer myself, I enjoy gathering data and the challenge of correlating that data into something useful. What I find interesting is that waiver information is very different as it relates to different parts of the country with respect to success rates, number of waivers, types and sizes of projects, etc.

But if there is one universal trend within the steel construction industry, it is that communication is always a challenge. Out of all the waivers I've dealt with, I would estimate that more than half of all designers that require AISC Certification are never notified when their requirements are waived. That is a staggering number when you consider how many structural steel construction projects take place in a given year.

A major challenge that designers face today is being kept in the loop when it comes to the decisions made on their project after their drawings leave their office. You can have more influence on how your drawings become realized in the field by requiring the use of an AISC Certified fabricator or erector in project specifications, and communicating the value of this requirement to the owner and contractor. AISC Certification now provides new resources to help you communicate the value of AISC Certification and become proactive in maintaining support for your project quality requirements.

Communicating Value

Designers usually require an AISC Certified fabricator or erector for their projects, because they understand what a certified quality management system represents and believe that they will be able to demonstrate the added value to their client. But many designers are never given that chance. Often, the scope of a design firm's responsibilities does not include the construction administration phase of the project. Contractors looking for the lowest bids may attempt to exploit this communication gap and waive quality requirements mandated by the contract documents without any notification to the designer.

So what can you do to ensure that you are kept in the loop and that your requirements are met? Communicate the value of the quality requirements to the entire project team early on—particularly to the owner. Take every opportunity to inform your team about why you have made AISC Certification a requirement.

Focus efforts on demonstrating value to the owner, a key project decision-maker by reason of the financial backbone he or she provides for a project. The communication effort by the designer is critical, because without it owners may rely too heavily on their general contractor or construction manager to make technical construction-related decisions when it comes to quality. There are documented cases where contractors have awarded contracts to the lowest bidder, regardless of whether they met the requirements set forth in the contract documents. Let the owner know that there may be additional information that his/her contractor may have left out. For example, did you know that by using an AISC Certified fabricator, you may not be required to meet the Special Inspection requirements set forth in section 1704 of the

Where Are We Now?

In the past, the "No More Waivers!" program played a predominantly reactive role when it came to saving quality-related project requirements. AISC Certification could only respond to those waivers that were brought to our attention. "No More Waivers!" relied mostly on specifiers and AISC Certified firms to identify potential waiver cases and to engage AISC as a partner to counter efforts to waive requirements. Together, through timely action focused on key project decision makers and appropriate information about the value of Certification, we were able to save jeopardized project Certification requirements 26% of the time in 2006.

The current goal of the "No More Waivers!" program is to eliminate quality requirement waivers altogether by making AISC Certification a prequalification to any bid list. As progress toward achieving this goal, Certified fabricators, erectors, and especially specifiers are increasingly assuming lead roles and taking the initiative in protecting Certification requirements—building cases for individual projects and working to educate members of the building industry in their local markets about the value of Certification without relying solely on AISC. In this sense, AISC Certification has transitioned into becoming a more proactive resource, enabling specifiers and Certified companies by providing more tools and information to make their cases.

The AISC Certification program is more widely accepted when compared to a year ago, and the awareness of the program among engineers and architects has increased dramatically. Since the beginning of 2007, AISC Certification has seen a total of only 13 waivers, a 59% decrease in the number of waivers received by this point last year! In addition to the lower number of waivers, 31% of those projects had a successful outcome, suggesting that the current overall proactive approach to waivers is more efficient, as well as more successful, than the reactive approach.

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.

current International Building Code? This sort of knowledge can save your client money. And AISC has taken steps to make this knowledge more accessible.

We've had Certification brochures for years, but they have never been available electronically—until now. The availability of these electronic files makes it much easier to share information about quality and the AISC Certification program with clients and colleagues. To download any of the AISC Certification brochures, please visit www.aisc.org/certbrochure. You are encouraged to email this URL to potential clients as well as your employees so that everyone has ready access to information supporting the value of your AISC Certification requirements—and knows where to look when faced with a potential waiver.

If you find yourself in a potential waiver situation and you need to inform the owner or contractor of your project about the value of quality and AISC Certification, writing a letter specific to your project is another good option. To help you get you started, AISC Certification provides a sample letter, available as an electronic resource online

at www.aisc.org/nomorewaivers. This sample letter can be used as a guideline, and the information included will be helpful in bringing your project owner up to speed on the value of your quality requirements. It also provides a summary of requirements covered by the AISC Certification program, a few key qualifications of a Certified fabricator or erector, and information about how complaints from project stakeholders are used to improve the program and Certified firms. Take the time to send your own version of this letter to the owner, contractor, and construction manager. With a follow-up phone call, you can ensure that members of your project team have received your message and understand the value of your quality requirements. The call will also allow you to answer questions.

If your letter and follow-up efforts fail to gain consideration in your waiver situation, you are invited to call or write AISC Certification for additional support. AISC can most effectively support your efforts when actions are based on the information you have collected. Use the "No More Waivers!" form provided at www.aisc.org/nomorewaivers as

a tool to communicate your waiver response history and identified decision-makers.

Lead by Example

The tools mentioned have been sent to our Certified fabricators and erectors as a waiver "survival pack," and the feedback has been positive and enthusiastic. In early May, Zane Keniston, one of Quality Management Company's auditors, e-mailed me to relate the following positive story from an AISC Certified company.

Representatives of Reynolds Iron Works, Inc., Williamsport, Pa., shared with Zane that they had been awarded a large public school contract that required an AISC Certified fabricator. The folks at Reynolds were excited, because the engineer on this project refused to waive the requirement for AISC Certification despite pressure from the contractor. When Zane asked Reynolds' owner if he could share details of the story with us at AISC Certification, the owner was delighted and sent copies of all his supporting documentation showing conversations that took place including a copy of the Division 5 specification and addenda pages of pre-bid RFIs seeking the waiver. It was clear that Reynolds Iron Works and the engineer had kept an open line of communication and that through the initiative of Reynolds representatives, the engineer was very well informed about the benefits and value of AISC Certification.

Increasing Awareness

As we move forward, our collective goal is to increase the industry's understanding of how quality provides value to projects. One way to do this is by advocating AISC Certification as a means for achieving quality in fabricated and erected steel. Using resources available to communicate with your project team early on allows you take an active role in protecting your specified quality requirements and AISC Certification. With those resources, you can also respond to attempts made to waive quality requirements through timely action focused on owners and contractors. Take on each project as if it were a building block of opportunity to improve the overall quality of the steel industry.

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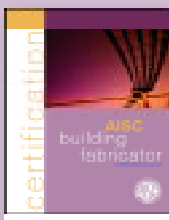
Reading Up on Certification

When faced with a situation where your Certification requirements are in jeopardy, know that help is available through the following AISC Certification tools and resources:

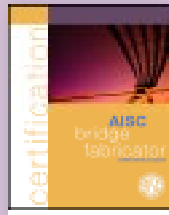
"Yes, It's That Important!" This brochure is geared toward engineers interested in not only finding out more about the AISC Certification program, but also how to educate their project team members on it. Find out what quality certification is, the differences between Certification and inspection, what to expect from a Certified company, key qualifications of Certified companies, and how to defend against pressure to waive your AISC Certification requirements.



AISC Building Fabricator Certification Program This brochure provides information about the AISC Standard for Steel Building Structures [STD] Certification—the only current building fabrication Certification category. Included is some general information about the Standard, what fabricators can expect from an audit, and key required qualifications. This is also a great brochure for specifiers, contractors, and owners interested in finding out more details about the program.



AISC Bridge Fabricator Certification Program Included in this brochure is information about the AISC Simple [SBR] and Major Bridge [CBR] Certification categories. This document provides a brief overview about the different Certification levels, program endorsements, key items that are independently audited, and resources to get a prospective company started. This brochure is also a great resource for specifiers who design bridges for state DOT's and other state and federal agencies.



AISC Erector Certification Program This brochure provides information about the AISC Certified Steel Erector (CSE) or Advanced Certified Steel Erector (ACSE) Certification programs. It also provides a brief overview of the different Certification levels, what erectors can expect from an audit, key items that are independently audited, and resources to get a company started. Use this brochure to educate your project team members about the many areas that this program addresses.

