

What Does the Future Hold for AISC Certification Programs?

BY JACQUES CATTAN

With new leadership, AISC continues to strengthen Certification and to plan for the future.

STOP READING THIS... no really STOP! Look at the top right hand corner of this page. Did you notice the *AISC Certification Programs* logo? Last month, we welcomed the new year by placing the logo on the Quality Corner column. As the incoming AISC vice president of certification, I would like to highlight the various programs the AISC certification department manages, all of which respond to the needs and advancement of the structural steel industry. In a continuously changing marketplace AISC's Certification Programs confirm to the design community and the construction industry that a company has the personnel, organization, experience, procedures, knowledge, equipment and commitment to meet the AISC Standards for that specific certification category.

Readers of this column are very familiar with one such certification program offered by AISC: The Quality Management Systems Certification (QMS). The AISC QMS Certification sets the quality standard for the structural steel industry and is the most recognized national quality certification program for that industry. Companies that are AISC QMS Certified have been through a rigorous initial evaluation, and are subject to annual reviews. The QMS Certification requires an examination to evaluate a company's quality management system rather than just a specific product. QMS Certification focuses on processes and procedures, since it is easier to manage quality into a project and impossible to inspect for it after the fact. I would direct the reader to two past *MSC* columns: "100%

Inspection is not QA" (January 2010) and "What is a Quality Management System?" (May 2010). Both are available as free downloads at www.modernsteel.com/backissues.

The QMS Certification Program starts with three essential elements, a one-page application, a required payment and a documented QMS plan. Upon receipt of all three elements AISC internally conducts an in-depth administrative review, and then requests an independent initial documentation audit followed by an independent initial on-site audit. When a company successfully completes the certification process, a certificate valid for one year is issued to note the accomplishment. What is of importance to note is that certification does not end there—as that would have labeled it as the completion of a QMS Audit only. We call it a QMS Certification Program. Why? What additional steps do we take to make it a program? Are you aware of these additional steps and initiatives?

The ideas for these initiatives have come from both our desire to improve our own program and from feedback of our participants and users. These are the people who are asking, "What else are you doing to make the program even better?" Below is a list of our current efforts:

Recurring annual on-site audits (based on a three-year cycle) demonstrate that a participant is not only meeting the program requirements but is also continually improving each year.

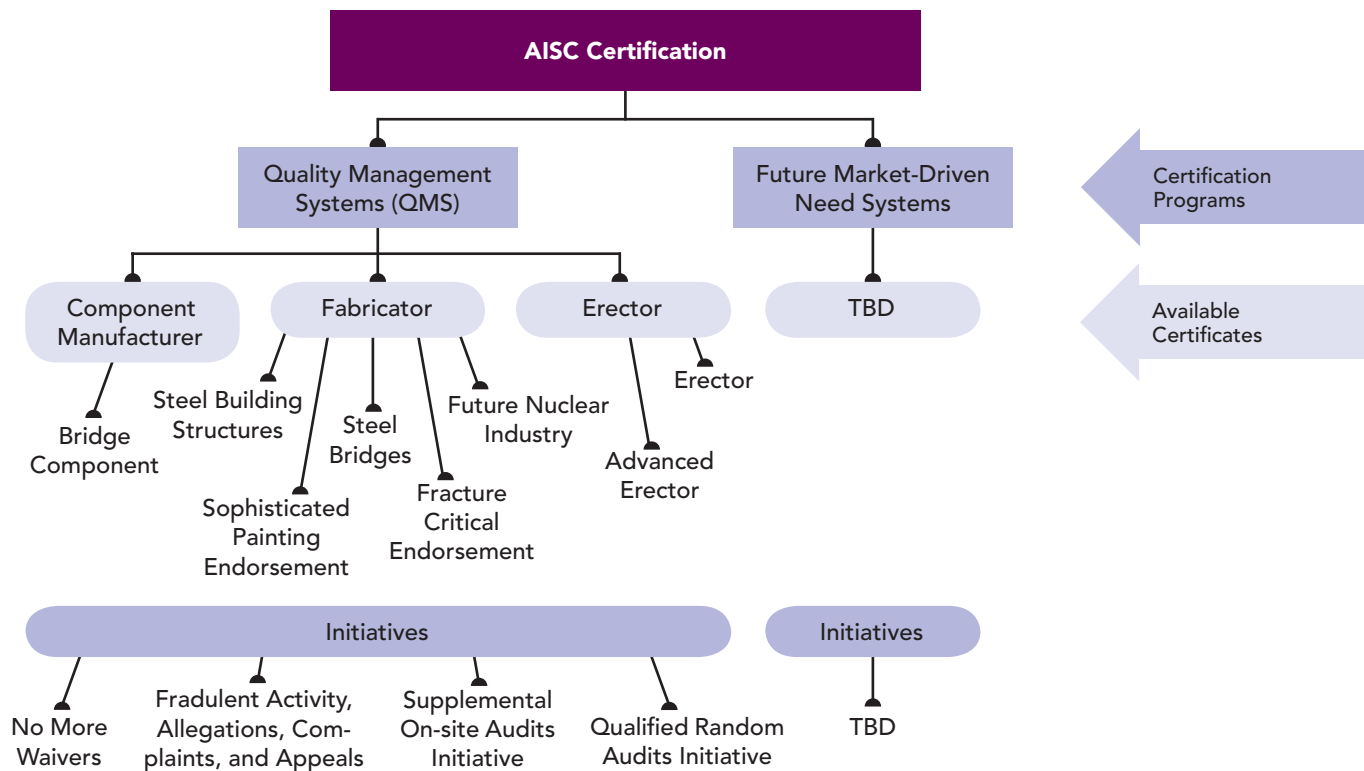
The Qualified Random Audits Initiative is our newest program addition that addresses concerns that our participants are not meeting the program requirements throughout the year. The initiative started during the 4th Quarter of 2010, with the first random audits being conducted in the first half of 2011. For additional information, see the October 2010 edition of this column ("AISC Certification—Qualified Random Audits") available as a free download at www.modernsteel.com/backissues.

Fraudulent Activity, Allegations, Complaints, and Appeals were highlighted in the April 2010 edition of this column to address the importance of program accountability to our participants and users. That article, "Accountability and AISC Certification," is also available as a free download at www.modernsteel.com/backissues.



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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.



▲ Each AISC Certification Program offers several certificates focused on the needs of the structural steel industry's marketplace.

No More Waivers is an ongoing initiative to help participants and users respond to the pressures of waiving a project's quality requirements. For additional information on this initiative, please visit www.aisc.org/nomorewaivers.

Supplemental on-site audits initiative allowing AISC to request additional on-site audits of a candidate company if necessary.

Ongoing feedback from our users and participants is one of the cornerstones of our program. Have you visited www.aisc.org/certfeedback? What are we doing right? How could we improve?

In addition to these specific ongoing initiatives, the current Certification Committee will be restructured in 2011. It will be renamed the Certification Standards Committee (CSC) and will become part of AISC's Engineering and research department (E&R). This realignment is a natural outgrowth of AISC's efforts to improve its standards development process. While AISC's technical standards have always been consensus documents, AISC formalized that commitment by becoming ANSI-

accredited by the "committee method" in 2000 and as an organization in 2002. Current certification standards have also been developed using the same consensus-based approach. The CSC will be responsible for the development and maintenance of the standards used by the structural steel industry certification programs and the committee will follow AISC's ANSI-accredited procedures.

As for the future, I have heard and seen the desire for an expansion of our current QMS Certification Program to the nuclear structural steel industry, a separate green certification program, and a business management certification program for starters. Regardless of our future path, AISC will continue to strive and provide certification programs driven by the needs of the structural steel construction industry's marketplace and grounded in the strength of its technical expertise. While we currently focus our efforts on the QMS Certification Program, I welcome all your comments and encourage you to contact me directly. **MSC**