

PCI IAS Accreditation FAQ

PCI achieved IAS accreditation in February 2016. There are many questions from Producer Members regarding PCI's accreditation. We recommend that you read this frequently asked questions document for further explanation of PCI's newly acquired IAS accreditation and to find out what it means for PCI-Certified plants and Producer Members.

What is IAS accreditation?

PCI achieved accreditation from the International Accreditation Service (IAS). IAS is a subsidiary of the International Code Council (ICC), a professional membership association that develops the construction codes and standards used by most municipalities within the United States. IAS is recognized by the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) for achieving full signatory status for accrediting Management System Certification Bodies (MSCB) in the areas of Quality Management Systems (QMS) and Environmental Management Systems (EMS).

The current scope of PCI's IAS accreditation is the PCI Plant Certification Program, which is managed in accordance with IAS Accreditation Criteria (AC) 477 (see: <http://iasonline.org/MSCB/>) and ISO/IEC 17021 Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems. PCI is authorized to issue IAS accredited certificates only for the PCI Plant Certification Program which is defined as Quality Management System discipline of certification in the industry sectors of concrete, cement, lime, plaster, the manufacture of articles of concrete, cement and/or plaster for construction, building of complete constructions or parts thereof, and for the use of civil engineering.

PCI's IAS accreditation provides objective evidence that an organization operates at the highest level of ethical, legal and technical standards, and demonstrates that PCI has been assessed and found to be competent to audit, monitor and certify management systems. This means that PCI has been granted accreditation as a Management System Certification Body to certify organizations to the PCI Plant Certification Program.

Why did PCI attain IAS Accreditation?

In order to ensure that all processes associated with PCI's quality management system certification process fall in line with internationally accepted best practices and to ensure continual improvement of the PCI Plant Certification program. Accreditation provides objective evidence of PCI's commitment to providing top-quality certification program.

PCI-Certified Plants devote significant resources to maintain their certification and PCI wants to be sure that they are getting the most benefit possible. PCI-Certified Plants are held to high standards and it is only appropriate that PCI is also held to a high standard. This is verified through the accreditation process, which is essentially certification of the PCI Certification Program.

Now that PCI is IAS accredited and the IAS logo are on the PCI Plant Certification Program certificate, does this mean that the PCI Certified Plants are now IAS accredited?

No, PCI-Certified Plants and Producer Members are not IAS accredited - only PCI is accredited. The PCI certificates contain the IAS mark of accreditation, which is an IAS requirement. The International Accreditation Forum (IAF) mark on the certificate has also been added to signify the MLA signatory status for the credentialing of the PCI Plant Certification certificate. This is a significant achievement, of which PCI's committee members and staff are very proud!

How does PCI's IAS accreditation benefit PCI's certified plants and Producer Members?

PCI's IAS accreditation has many benefits for a PCI-Certified Plant. The plant's certificate is now highly regarded worldwide. Also, because of IAS's close relationship with ICC, which governs the majority of building codes in the U.S., PCI's accreditation will enhance the PCI Plant Certification Program's standing with various building departments and Authorities Having Jurisdiction across the nation.

PCI-Certified Plants manufacture engineered-to-order and other complex structural and non-structural elements. IAS Accreditation provides objective evidence that PCI's Plant Certification Program operates at the highest level of ethical, legal and technical standards – it is not just a club.

The users of PCI's accredited certificates are the precast producers, architects, engineers, general contractors, construction managers, and project owners. These users are now offered a Customer Satisfaction Process from PCI. Complaints can be officially filed with the Director of Quality Programs. The PCI website now has information about program procedures, actions regarding withdrawn certificates, certification regulations, and information about the PCI Appeals and Complaints processes. For details, please see the following web pages on the PCI website: http://www.pci.org/PCI_Certification/Plant_Certification/ and http://www.pci.org/PCI_Certification/Plant_Certification/Plant_Certification_Procedures/.

In addition to these website updates, a Feedback page has also been added to the PCI website. This page contains many forms producers can utilize for their own Quality Management Systems. In addition, this page has Customer Satisfaction and Complaints forms available for use by producers to submit to PCI. Please see: http://www.pci.org/PCI_Certification/Plant_Certification/PCI_Customer_Feedback/.

What are some of the more significant changes to the Plant Certification program that directly affect PCI-Certified plants as a result of the IAS accreditation requirements?

PCI-Certified Plants have likely noticed the two most significant changes already, as they had to be implemented prior to PCI's IAS assessments. First, nonconformances are now classified as minor and major nonconformances. Second, all nonconformances require written response from the plant with planned corrective action (for minor nonconformances) and objective evidence of corrective action taken (for major nonconformances). Corrective action for minor nonconformances is verified during subsequent audits while major nonconformances must be closed out prior to the next audit. This means that plants must take corrective action immediately upon learning of a major nonconformance and submit objective

evidence (photos, copies of records, etc.) to PCI for verification that the major nonconformance has been satisfactorily addressed. Many agree this is a big improvement to the program and will enhance the program's credibility.

What is the difference between major and minor nonconformances and is there a list of them?

Unfortunately, there is no list of major and minor nonconformances, as there are likely too many to list.

Major nonconformances are described as the plant's absence of addressing, or the failure to implement or maintain one or more of the requirements to the PCI Plant Certification Program. Minor Nonconformances are a minor lapse in the compliance of the plant's management system against the requirements.

Common major nonconformances may include a complete lack of testing or testing records, a lack of required PCI-Certified personnel, complete disregard for one or more program requirement, a repeated minor nonconformance, etc.

Common minor nonconformances may include a few missing tests records in a file, a one-off mistake made in the production process, minor deviation from a standardized test method, etc.

Why is PCI requesting additional documentation for response to major nonconformances cited on the Audit Report?

To acquire and maintain the IAS accreditation, PCI has implemented a thorough audit response follow-up process. In addition to the previously required plant response to nonconformances, PCI is now requiring plant's to take corrective and/or preventive actions by submitting objective evidence of actions taken to mitigate major nonconformances. PCI will review, accept and verify the effectiveness of the corrective actions taken for major nonconformances and the planned corrective actions for minor nonconformances by the Plant.

The audit may be considered a failed audit if a plant does not satisfactorily addresses major nonconformances with supporting evidence by the Plant. Objective evidence of corrective actions must be included with the plant's response to nonconformances within 30 days of the Corrective Action Request from PCI. The Plant's failure to implement corrective actions for a previous minor nonconformance will result in escalation to a major nonconformance. For all continuing plants currently in the program, major nonconformances must be closed out for recertification, while the corrective action for minor nonconformances may be verified during the next audit.

How do these new follow-up audit response processes effect the audit score?

The numeric audit scoring will remain the same. Previous minor nonconformance items that have not been corrected by the next audit will be scored 5 points lower. If the item has not been corrected at the following audit, then the item is escalated to a major nonconformance and will be scored an additional 5 points lower or more, depending on the severity of the nonconformance. The plant holds the risk of a failed audit as items score lower and lower at each subsequent audit. Procedures to close out nonconformances and to

undergo failed audit proceedings all apply, as described within PCI Policies and Procedures, Section 20.0 PCI Plant Certification Program.

Why do the PCI auditors now hold an audit opening meeting?

In addition to other requirements PCI had to implement in order to acquire and maintain the IAS accreditation, PCI has implemented Opening Audit Meetings. These Opening Meeting are held between the Auditor and the plant management to discuss the Audit Plan. The Audit Plan is an outline of the activities the auditor will undergo to determine whether the plant has implemented and maintained processes that are compliant to the Audit Criteria, Principles, and Objectives.

The Audit Plan is discussed to confirm the audit scope and any changes in the plant's activities which may affect the Audit, as well as review the plant's certification categories and if any actions are necessary to renew the specific certification categories. This meeting is to also address previous nonconformances which will be followed-up during the audit. The plant representatives that attend the opening meeting will be asked to sign an attendance sheet. This signature is to identify that the plant has reviewed and accepted the Audit plan. Also note that the plant has an option to provide an audit guide to assist the auditor within the plant's facilities. All of these items are recorded in the Auditor's Opening Meeting records.

Is there any other program changes the PCI certified plants and Producer Members should be aware of?

One important change to note is that in order for PCI to acquire and maintain the IAS accreditation, PCI has implemented a Recertification Process. This process aligns with the PCI Renewal Cycle. The Recertification Audits occur during July through December, and the necessary subsequent follow-up audits, or Surveillance Audits, conducted to verify a plant's actions taken to mitigate or eliminate nonconformances occur during January through June. All certified plants continuing their certification into the next year must close out all Major Nonconformances by June 30th.