



INTERNATIONAL ACCEPTANCE
PCI's IAS accreditation ensures its quality-certification process aligns with international best practices.

Who is IAS?

IAS is a nonprofit, public-benefit corporation providing accreditation services since 1975. A subsidiary of International Code Council (ICC), it accredits a range of companies and organizations, including governmental entities, commercial businesses, and professional associations. It acts similarly to a registrar and has more than 900 accredited entities worldwide. IAS accreditation is based on recognized national and international standards that ensure domestic and global acceptance of its accreditations.

PCI PLANT CERTIFICATION PROGRAM GAINS IAS Accreditation

International Accreditation Service now accredits PCI Plant Certification Program, increasing credibility and awareness for industry stakeholders, code officials, specifiers and international authorities

— **Craig A. Shutt**

After several years of preparatory work by both committee members and staff at the Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute, the organization has achieved accreditation from the International Accreditation Service (IAS). It has accredited PCI's Plant Certification Program, which now is managed in accordance with IAS Accreditation Criteria (AC) 477 and ISO/IEC 17021 *Conformity Assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audits and certification of management systems*.

"IAS provides objective evidence that an organization operates at the highest level of ethical, legal, and technical standards," explains Dean A. Frank, PCI director of quality programs. The group is a subsidiary of the International Code Council (ICC), which develops the construction codes and standards used by most municipalities. The three driving tenets of the accreditation procedure are "Competency, Confidentiality, and Impartiality."

PLANT CERTIFICATION COVERED

The accreditation covers PCI's plant certification and does not extend to its Erector Certification or Personnel Certification programs currently, Frank notes. "Our focus has been on meeting the quality-management needs that satisfy the PCI's criteria for the manufacture of precast concrete products and revising our certification requirements to bring them in alignment with worldwide best practices."

Those efforts have included developing a comprehensive Quality Management System Manual and the requisite supporting operating-procedure documents, along with revising PCI Policies governing plant certification, and developing standardized competency and evaluation requirements for PCI staff, committee members, and plant auditors. In addition, a new committee on Safeguarding Impartiality was established to enhance confidentiality and impartiality requirements.

"Our goal in attaining IAS accreditation was to ensure all processes associated with PCI's quality-management system certification process fall in line with internationally accepted best practices and to ensure continuous improvement of the PCI Plant Certification program," Frank says. "Accreditation provides objective validation of PCI's commitment to providing top-quality certification programs that reassure specifiers and provide owners, designers, engineers, and contractors with the high-quality products that help them do their jobs and grow the industry."

ALL GAIN BENEFITS

IAS's independent accreditation of PCI's plant certification procedures provides everyone on the construction team with more assurance that the products will perform as anticipated, with tighter tolerances, precise mix designs, and long-term quality.

"It provides a tool for specifiers who can write into their specifications that PCI-Certified products must be used, thus ensuring they receive exactly the products they need," Frank explains. "PCI-Certified Plants devote significant resources to maintaining their certification, and they want to be certain they receive the most benefits possible from that effort. PCI-Certified Plants are held to high standards, and it's only appropriate that PCI also is held to a high standard. This accreditation process verifies those standards, essentially providing "certification" of PCI's certification process."

PCI sought to achieve multiple goals with this accreditation. They include:

- Ensuring all processes associated with the quality-management process fall in line with internationally accepted best practices.
- Providing a tool to ensure continuous improvement of the PCI Plant Certification program.
- Maintaining and increasing credibility with design professionals, code officials, and authorities having jurisdiction.
- Providing objective evidence of PCI's commitment to providing top-quality certification programs.
- Assuring specifiers that PCI-Certified Plants can manufacture engineered-to-order and complex structural and nonstructural elements as designed.
- Showing that PCI's plants operate at the highest level of ethical, legal, and technical standards.
- Offering credentials to ensure PCI Plant Certification will be accepted in the marketplace and by governmental agencies that regulate service or product acceptance.
- Aligning more closely with ICC and enhancing the program's standing with various building departments and authorities having jurisdiction.
- Increasing credibility of the Plant Certification program on an international level.

The program addresses any perceived conflicts of interest in having PCI-retained personnel performing certification audits for the plants, Frank explains. It provides an outside, credible source to review performance and standards that is accepted worldwide.

Significant changes were made to the PCI Certification Process to align with the IAS requirements, Frank notes. These involve identifying all nonconforming practices and separating them into minor and major actions that must be addressed. Any nonconforming practice also requires a written response from the plant with planned corrective actions to document progress. "Plants must take immediate corrective action upon learning of a major nonconformance issue and submit objective evidence, such as photos, copies of records, etc., to PCI for verification that the nonconforming practices have been addressed. Many agree this is a big improvement to the program and will enhance the program's credibility."

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION FOCUS

A key element for owners, architects, engineers, contractors, construction managers, and others working with the precaster is the Customer Satisfaction Process. This system ensures complaints about quality or other aspects of the products can be officially filed with the Director of Quality Programs, who then coordinates with the plant to give additional incentive for the plant to resolve the issues.

To facilitate any questions, a Feedback page had been added to the PCI website. It contains forms that can be filled out and submitted to PCI quickly.

Designers and others on the construction team will benefit by reassurances of consistent quality across all participating plants and the capability to specify precise needs and receive them. In the past, various building departments have accepted PCI Plant Certification in lieu of Special Inspections required in the International Building Code's Chapter 17. "In those cases, PCI-Certified Plants were deemed to be Approved Fabricators in those jurisdictional areas," Frank explains.

IAS Accreditation offers more assurance to the construction team that quality standards are being met and offers more consistency among all PCI members. "IAS accreditation provides independent verification that the program's procedures appropriately address competency, confidentiality, and impartiality," says Frank. "It should go a long way in easing the minds of construction team."



TIGHT TOLERANCES

IAS Accreditation ensures the construction team that products will meet specifications with tight tolerances and precise mixes.