

Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute's (PCI's) Plant Certification Program is administered by PCI's quality management system (QMS). PCI's QMS includes audit and certification policies and procedures that are in compliance with International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards ISO 19011, ISO 9001, ISO/IEC 17021-1, ISO/IEC 17021-3, and International Accreditation Service (IAS) Accreditation Criteria AC477. PCI Standards Manuals (MNL-116, MNL-117, and/or MNL-130) are the criteria applied in the PCI Plant Certification Program. PCI is accredited by American National Standards Institute as a Standards Developing Organization and by IAS as a Management System Certification Body. PCI's Plant Certification Program is the national standard for quality management systems of plants within the precast/prestressed concrete industry. PCI regulates its policies and procedures in the following key areas critical to the success of the audit and certification program:

QUALITY ASSURANCE

PCI controls all of its certification activities through rigorous policies and procedures. PCI certification activities cover the competencies and training of the personnel engaged in its certification activities, including the staff members, auditors, and committee members. PCI certification activities also include the client application review process, the audit process, and the certification decision process. All of these certification activities and elements are performed and handled impartially and confidentially per PCI policy within PCI's regulations.

COMPETENCE OF PERSONNEL

To perform or handle certification activities, the PCI staff, auditors, and committee members involved with the audit schemes and certification programs must sign an impartiality and confidentiality agreement. PCI maintains controlled forms to document this process in accordance with PCI policies for record keeping. PCI also has an abundance of other procedures and policies in place to ensure that its personnel involved in the certification activities comply with PCI regulations.

The training and evaluation of competencies of PCI staff and auditors who perform application review, audits, audit review, and certification decision are all documented and tracked to make sure they are kept up-to-date. Similarly, PCI documents and tracks all application reviews, audit reviews, and certification decisions to verify their compliance with IAS's regulations.

PCI personnel, particularly PCI staff, who have demonstrated that they meet the highest standards with respect to PCI's regulations can be appointed certification officers if it is verified that they have the required competence to undertake PCI's internal certification activities and perform them confidentially and impartially. PCI auditors cannot be appointed certification officers because the appointment would present a conflict of interest.

IMPARTIALITY OF THE PROGRAM

To ensure that PCI maintains impartiality within its certification activities, PCI assigns the audit team to its clients, and certification officers make certification decisions solely based on the sampled, objective evidence from the audit findings. If a certification officer or an assigned auditor has a known conflict of interest with a client, a different certification officer or auditor will be selected to perform this particular certification activity with the PCI client.

PCI audits are performed according to PCI regulations, with emphasis on the audit plan and audit procedure. PCI auditors maintain a checklist during an audit to confirm that they impartially and confidentially performed the audit according to the PCI regulations. The certification officer reviews this checklist to verify that the audit meets with PCI's regulations and standards.

PCI's audit schemes, certification programs, and quality management systems operate transparently. PCI clients are made aware of the audit plan in an opening meeting before each audit is performed. Clients are also notified of all nonconformances found during their audit at the audit exit meeting.

AUDIT REPORTING

After an audit is performed, the auditor finalizes the audit report and the grading sheets. The audit report is then submitted by the auditor to the PCI certification officer for review. After reviewing and approving the audit report, the PCI certification officer forwards it to the client. The client then submits a response-to-nonconformances letter, along with all associated objective evidence to support the response, to the PCI certification officer. The PCI certification officer reviews this letter and the associated evidence and then forwards it to the auditor for his or her recommendations, which are based on the auditor's review of the response letter and evidence. This process applies regardless of whether the client receives a passing or failing grade.

A special audit may or may not be required at this point. If a client receives a failing audit grade, a special immediate audit will be required. Such an audit is usually not required if the client received a passing audit grade; the PCI certification officer determines that the response-to-nonconformances letter and associated evidence are adequate; and the client has addressed all major nonconformances listed in the audit report. However, a subsequent audit may be required after a passing grade is given, if an audit is determined to be the only way to confirm that the client has taken corrective/preventive actions.

CERTIFICATION DECISION

Once the required steps for closing the audit findings have been completed, the PCI certification officer can decide whether to grant certification to the client for the first time, extend an existing certification, or recertify the client. The certification officer makes the certification decision based on the objective evidence of audit findings and the client's plans for or implementation of preventive/corrective actions. The certification decision is documented and tracked as required by PCI's regulations. The documentation requirements apply to all audit types (initial, surveillance, recertification, and special audits). The PCI certification officer uses the documented form to verify that the review has been done competently. The PCI certification officer then notifies the client of the decision to grant certification, allow for continuing certification, or deny certification.