

The SSPC-QP 1 Certification Process

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Who is SSPC

- SSPC is a not-for-profit technical organization that publishes consensus technical standards, offers management and craft worker training and qualification programs, contractor and individual certification programs, best practice publications, and conferences and meetings for the marine and industrial protective coatings industry

SSPC Mission

- SSPC: the Society for Protective Coatings, serves its members and advances the industry through standards, regulatory advocacy, education, and information exchange.
- Members include painting and specialty contractors, facility owners, coatings inspectors, consultants, material and equipment suppliers and other interested persons.

SSPC-QP 1 Certification

What is it?

- QP 1 Certification is a program established by SSPC in 1989 to evaluate the primary technical capabilities of marine and industrial painting contractors.
- The QP 1 Administrative Certification Program is based on the requirements of the consensus standard Qualification Procedure No. 1, "Standard Procedure for Evaluating Painting Contractors," Sept. 2000 Version.

How does SSPC Certify a Contracting Firm to the QP 1 Standards?

- First, a contractor must submit an application and submittal package. Detailed instructions and forms can be downloaded from SSPC's web site www.sspc.org, click on certification.
- Secondly, the application and submittals must be accepted by the SSPC Certification Manager after careful review.

Assigning the Audit

- Once the application and submittals are accepted by the certification manager (CM), the CM assigns the “field” audit to an SSPC auditor.
- The initial field audit consists of a visit to the company’s headquarters offices and at least one active job site where the contractor can demonstrate operational capabilities.

The Audit

- Initial audits usually take 2 days to complete, depending on how far the job site is from the headquarters offices.
- Before beginning the audit, the auditor sits down with key management personnel and explains the audit process to them and asks if they have any questions about the process. This is called the “opening” interview.

Audit Process (Cont'd.)

- While it is critical that key management personnel be available during the audit, SSPC auditors do everything they can to avoid disruptions in production. For example, in the opening interview the auditor will explain which persons he needs to speak to during the audit and when so each person can plan their day.

Audit Process (Cont'd.)

- The QP 1 audit is conducted using standardized audit checklists. These checklists are available on the SSPC web site allowing contractor personnel to know what questions are going to be asked.
- At the conclusion of the audit, key management personnel are asked to attend a closing meeting.

What Areas are Audited?

- SSPC auditors review the contractor's Management Procedures, Technical Capabilities, Quality Control (including conformance with NAVSEA standard items (e.g. 00932) and applicable NSTMs including 631 and 634 - approved job specific PCP's) and Safety and Health Compliance Programs.
- Audit checklists are available on the SSPC web site. SSPC encourages initial applicants to do an internal audit prior to the initial audit.

Certification Process (Cont'd.)

- At the closing meeting, the auditor explains any deficiencies cited and asks the lead management person to acknowledge the deficiencies by signing the deficiency schedule.
- After the exit interview the audit is concluded.

Audit Results

- SSPC sends formal audit results approximately 2 weeks after the audit.
- Contractors can appeal audit results. Appeals, however, must have substance.
- If audit is successful, SSPC issues certificates for a one-year period.

Feedback on Audit

- After the auditor leaves and the audit is concluded, contractors are encouraged to rate the auditor's performance by completing the auditor evaluation form.
- These ratings have no impact on the audit results since the evaluation is sent to the Department Director after the audit has concluded.

Renewal of Certification

- Contractors renew certification by submitting a modified renewal application, which is due in early January each calendar year.
- As part of the renewal process, contractors must perform and document an internal audit prior to the SSPC external audit.
- Contractors must pass an annual (abbreviated) maintenance audit (at a job site) in each of the 2 years following the initial audit to maintain QP 1.
- Contractors must undergo a full audit after 3 years.

Auditor Approach

- SSPC auditors are trained to approach the audit in a non-adversarial manner. Auditors are encouraged to find what's right about your operations.
- This doesn't mean that deficiencies will be ignored — it means that the auditor doesn't come in to the audit going out of his way to find something wrong.

Auditor Technical Qualifications

- SSPC auditors are highly qualified protective coatings specialists.
- They are required to be SSPC PCS certified or NACE CIP, or both.
- If they conduct NAVSEA audits, they have to also be NBPI certified.
- Each auditor must initially undergo training on the principles of auditing and then undergo follow up (technical and auditing process) training sessions at least once each year.

Auditor Experience

- Each auditor must also have at least 5 years experience in the protective coatings industry performing quality auditing or related experience.
- SSPC auditors average over 20 years industry experience as contractor project managers or Quality Control Managers, Coating Specifiers, Material Supplier Technical Representatives, Paint Laboratory Managers, Coating Inspectors (in the Shop and Field), industry trainers and evaluators, and quality systems auditors.

Auditor Physical Qualifications

- SSPC auditors must undergo annual physical exams (e.g. eye exam; hearing conservation; pulmonary function; general physical health required to walk a job site).

Safety and Health Training

- SSPC auditors are all C-3 qualified and must receive annual refresher (C-5) training on the hazards of removing lead-based paint and other hazardous paints
- SSPC auditors receive annual OSHA Refresher Training (e.g., covering fall protection; confined space entry; hearing conservation; Haz Com and general safety training)

Disciplinary Action Criteria

- SSPC has, in place, a strict Disciplinary Action Criteria (DAC) for Program Violations that occur outside of the audit
- Contractors can be placed on *Warning* or *Probation*, or be *suspended* or have their certification *revoked* for affirmed violations
- DAC program posted on SSPC Web site

Thank You

Any questions?