



Clearing the Water

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Selecting the certification body that best meets your company's needs

By Amy Reichel

Manufacturers of drinking water treatment products often struggle to determine which certification body they should choose for their products. Many companies mistakenly assume NSF Intl. is the only option for certification to NSF/ANSI standards—after all, the name of the organization is right there in the standard title. They also may assume other certification bodies are not equivalent or the certification they provide is not as rigorous as NSF.

“Even if they happen to have their name in the title, no certification body has exclusive rights to certify products to those standards,” said Tom Spoden, product certification

director for the Water Quality Assn. (WQA). “As long as a certification body is accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and meets the ISO 17065 requirements, any certification body can certify products to these standards, and that certification is equally valid, regardless of whether you do business with WQA or any other certifier.”

Audits & Assessments

ANSI serves as a watchdog for standards development and conformity assessment programs and processes. This accreditation signifies procedures and processes used by standards-developing organizations in

connection with the development of ANSI standards meet the institute's requirements for openness, balance, consensus and due process.

ANSI performs yearly audits on certification bodies to ensure they maintain compliance with the strict regulations and rules associated with operating a certification program.

"Different certification bodies may test and certify to different standards," Spoden said. "If the certification body demonstrates that it can competently certify products according to the referenced standards, then those standards, or types of products included in the referenced standards, are added to that certification body's approved scope."

If more than one certification body has a specific standard listed under its scope, the certification is equivalent because of the ANSI accreditation and audits.

Similar to ANSI is the Standards Council of Canada (SCC), which also works with accreditation programs that deal with standardization issues. However, SCC's accreditation programs are based on internationally recognized standards and guidelines. Like ANSI, SCC visits certification bodies to conduct audits of their programs to ensure they maintain compliance with the regulations and rules.

Accreditation by either or both ANSI and SCC ensures that a certifier is following a specific set of guidelines and rules. It provides confidence that the certified products meet U.S. (ANSI) or Canadian (SCC) regulations for import and sale throughout the U.S. and Canada. Both accreditation bodies follow the ISO 17065 standard for product certification programs.

Standardizing Certification

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) are two of the world's largest voluntary standardization bodies. Under ISO 17065, a certification body is required to undergo external audits and be accredited by a third party, such as ANSI or SCC. ANSI and SCC accreditation demonstrates that a certification body is operating in accordance with ISO 17065, which includes the following requirements. A certification body must:

- Be an independent organization with documentation

demonstrating it is a legal entity;

- Be impartial and accessible to all appropriate applicants;
- Employ personnel who have the necessary education, training, technical knowledge and experience to perform certification tasks;
- Have a quality control system in place, with a document listing its quality policy and objectives;
- Specify the conditions for granting, maintaining and extending certification, along with suspending or withdrawing a certification partially or completely;
- Evaluate products against the certification criteria;
- Provide product certification applicants with a full report on the outcome of the evaluation, including any non-conformities that must be settled;
- Provide certified manufacturers with formal certification documents, such as a signed certificate; and
- Perform ongoing facility inspections (audits) of certified manufacturers and their programs and processes.

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While ANSI, ISO and IEC ensure that accredited certification bodies all meet certain core requirements, not all programs perform the same way, Spoden pointed out. "Just because a certification body meets the equivalent requirements to its peers does not mean that the program is identical in every way," he said. "Even within the ANSI-accredited structure, certification bodies have a certain amount of leeway to set policy on the frequency of re-testing and facility inspection. They also have variances in project turnaround time and cost." That is why when you are looking for a certification body, you should find the one that fits your needs best, while having confidence that no matter which you choose, its certification is equivalent to other certification bodies. **WQP**

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