

Why use an Accredited Inspection Body?



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Why use an accredited inspection body?

There are many companies that provide inspection services, sometimes at what initially appears to be low cost. However, before commissioning an organisation to undertake such work it is important to consider the risks:

- Are you confident that the organisation has the technical competence to undertake the work in question?
- Are you satisfied that the organisation has the resources to do the work?
- Are the inspectors working to suitable codes of conduct to ensure inspections are carried out impartially and with integrity?
- Are you confident that the organisation has an adequate management system in place?
- Are you satisfied that safeguards are in place, e.g. effective complaints and appeals procedures, in case difficulties arise?

Inspection body accreditation is a formal means of determining the technical competence of inspection bodies to perform specific types of inspection. Accreditation provides a ready means for customers to identify and select reliable inspection services, suitable for their needs.



How then can you be sure that an inspection body is technically competent?

Throughout the world, many countries rely on a process called accreditation as a means of confirming technical competence. Accreditation uses criteria and procedures specifically developed to determine technical competence. Specialist technical assessors conduct a thorough evaluation of all factors in an inspection body that affect the outcome of inspections.

The criteria are based on the internationally accepted standard ISO/IEC 17020: *Conformity assessment – requirements for the various types of bodies performing inspection*, which is used for demonstrating the competence of inspection bodies throughout the world. Accreditation bodies use this standard specifically to assess factors relevant to an inspection body's ability to produce consistently reliable and impartial inspection results, including consideration of the following:

- technical competence of staff (including qualifications, training and experience)
- appropriateness of inspection methods
- the use of suitable equipment (properly calibrated and maintained)
- safeguards to ensure impartiality and confidentiality
- code of conduct and processes for working safely
- effective quality assurance procedures

Inspection body accreditation uses criteria and procedures specifically developed to verify technical competence. Once accredited, inspection bodies are re-assessed regularly to ensure continued compliance with requirements, and to check that the required standard of operation is being maintained.



What is inspection?

Inspection is an essential part of ensuring the operational safety of many items that the public use in their daily lives. Safety of food production is a prime example, as are cranes, boilers and pressure vessels used in the workplace. The competence of inspection services employed by local and national authorities and other organisations to ensure regulatory requirements are being met is often assured by accreditation.

Inspection is the examination of a product design, product, service, process or installation, to determine conformity with general or specified requirements. Inspection bodies must demonstrate, to an accreditation body, that they have the necessary competence to perform specified tasks before they can achieve accreditation.

There is a close relationship between inspection, testing and measurement. Inspection involves examinations by competent personnel using techniques including:

- Visual examination
- Visual comparison with standards (e.g. colour matching)
- Dimensional checks
- Examination using gauges and instruments.

Examples of activities which benefit from accreditation include inspection of pressure equipment, cranes and passenger ropeways, inspection of offshore structures for oil and gas exploration and production, mechanical equipment inspection, non-destructive testing, inspection of meat, dairy products and other food production, bio-security and border control inspections, to name a few.



How can you tell if an inspection body is accredited?

Accredited inspection bodies are authorised to issue inspection reports or certificates bearing some type of symbol or endorsement indicating their accreditation. Users of inspection services should also check with the inspection body what specific inspections they are accredited to do. This is normally specified in their Scope of Accreditation, which may be supplied by the inspection body upon request and is normally listed on the accreditation body's website.

What if the inspection body has ISO 9001 certification?

Inspection bodies can be audited and certified to an international management systems standard such as ISO 9001. This standard is widely used in manufacturing and service organisations to evaluate their systems for managing the quality of their products or services. Certification of an organisation's quality management systems against ISO 9001 confirms compliance of the management system with this standard, but does not specify requirements for technical competence and impartiality of the inspection body.





What about reports or certificates from overseas inspection bodies?

Most economies around the world have one or more organisations responsible for the accreditation of their nation's inspection bodies to the ISO/IEC 17020 standard, ensuring a uniform approach to verifying inspection body competence. This consistent approach allows economies to establish cross border agreements, based on mutual evaluation and acceptance of each other's inspection body accreditation systems. Such international agreements, called mutual recognition arrangements (MRAs), are crucial in enabling inspection reports to be accepted between these economies. In effect, each partner in such an MRA recognises the other partner's accredited inspection bodies as if they themselves had undertaken the accreditation of the other partner's inspection bodies.

The criteria used by signatories of the ILAC Inspection Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) for accrediting inspection bodies is the Standard ISO/IEC 17020 *Conformity assessment – requirements for the various types of bodies performing inspection*.

Full details for the ILAC Arrangement and the list of signatories can be found on the ILAC website at www.ilac.org.

This system of international MRAs between accreditation bodies enables accredited inspection bodies to achieve international recognition, and allows reports and certificates accompanying exported goods to be more readily accepted in participating economies. This effectively reduces costs for manufacturers, suppliers, exporters and importers, as it reduces or eliminates the need for products to be re-inspected in other economies.

Economies without their own accreditation systems can seek to have their inspection bodies accredited by established accreditation systems, from other ILAC economies.



Why is using an accredited inspection body so critical to you as a manufacturer, supplier or exporter?

Minimise risk

Throughout the world today, businesses and customers seek reassurance that the products, materials or services they produce or purchase meet their expectations or conform to specific requirements. This often means that the items are inspected to determine their characteristics against a standard or a specification. For the manufacturer or supplier, choosing a technically competent inspection body minimises the risk of producing or supplying a faulty product.

Avoid expensive reinspection

Inspecting products and materials can be expensive and time consuming. If the quality of the inspection is poor, the consequences can be expensive; as well as the need for re-inspection, if a product has failed to meet specifications or customer expectations, it may lead to product recalls, rework, litigation and reimbursement. If reinspection is required, it is invariably damaging to the reputation of the supplier or manufacturer too. Choosing a technically competent inspection body minimises the chance of additional inspection being required.

Enhance your customers' confidence

Confidence in a product is enhanced if clients know it has been thoroughly evaluated by an independent, competent inspection body. This is particularly so if a product supplier can demonstrate to their customers that the inspection body itself has been evaluated by a third party. Increasingly customers are relying on independent inspection evidence, rather than simply accepting a supplier's word that the product is "fit for purpose".

Reduce costs and improve acceptance of goods internationally

Through the ILAC Inspection Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA), technically competent, accredited inspection bodies receive international recognition, which allows their inspection reports to be more readily accepted in other economies. This recognition helps to reduce costs for manufacturers and exporters by reducing or eliminating the need for additional inspection in the importing economy.

Where can I get more information?

For more information on accredited inspection bodies, you will need to contact your ILAC recognised accreditation body. To find out if your economy has one or more inspection accreditation bodies, visit the website of the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) at www.ilac.org and use the directory of accreditation bodies available on this website.

More information about ILAC

ILAC is the peak international authority on laboratory and inspection accreditation, with a membership consisting of accreditation bodies and stakeholder organisations throughout the world. Its internet site at www.ilac.org can provide a range of information on laboratory and inspection accreditation, as well as the location of its members world-wide.

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