

PLANT CERTIFICATION FAQs

Q: What is the NPCA Plant Certification Program?

A: The NPCA Plant Certification Program is an exciting way for precast concrete plants to demonstrate their commitment to production of high-quality products. The basis of this voluntary certification program is the Quality Control Manual for Precast Concrete Plants (NPCA Quality Control Manual) published by NPCA. The program covers all aspects of a precast operation necessary for quality assurance during the production of high-quality precast concrete products. Compliance with the Quality Control Manual is verified through annual audits of certified plants. The program certifies that plants meeting the requirements set forth in the NPCA Quality Control Manual are capable of producing high-quality products. The program does not certify products themselves.

Q: What products are covered in the NPCA Quality Control Manual?

A: Virtually all precast concrete products composed of both normal and no-slump (dry-cast) concrete are covered in the manual. Typically, NPCA certified plants produce precast components that can be classified into one of the following categories:

- Water & Wastewater Products
- Sanitary & Stormwater Products
- Utility & Industrial Products
- Transportation Products
- Building, Housing, Landscaping and Specialty Products

Q: Why should a precast concrete plant consider becoming certified under the NPCA Plant Certification Program?

A: There are many benefits to precasters who participate in the Plant Certification Program, including:

- The Plant Certification Program assists management in achieving excellence in plants and operations. When an auditor enters a plant, he brings with him the experience of observing many other precast plants across the United States. A plant benefits from insights on how to improve processes, efficiency and products.

- The Plant Certification Program assures a uniformly high degree of excellence in plant facilities, production, processes and quality control operations.
- On projects where the NPCA Plant Certification Program is specified, one standard of quality is set for all precast concrete products, effectively leveling the playing field for all plants wishing to supply products to the project.
- The program creates additional opportunities for plants, and the precast industry as a whole, by showing the company's commitment to producing high-quality precast concrete products. The users and specifiers of these products also benefit because they can easily identify and select high-quality precast concrete manufacturers.
- Provides recognition for plants that strive for and achieve a high degree of excellence. A certified plant stands out among plants wishing to supply products to a particular project.

Q: What is the process of becoming certified?

A: To begin the process, a plant must first complete the application/contract for NPCA Plant Certification and return it, along with the required payment, to NPCA. A copy of this application/contract can be obtained directly from NPCA by calling (800) 366-7731 or at www.precast.org/certification/. The audit agency will then contact the plant to schedule the audit. During the audit, plant personnel have the opportunity to accompany the auditor and learn of possible operation and plant improvements. The audit agency then provides written reports of its findings, suggestions for improvement and corresponding grading schedule to the plant.



PLANT CERTIFICATION FAQs

Q: How long does it take for a precast plant to become certified?

A: The initial certification process takes about six weeks from the time a plant's application is received, through the plant audit and notification of results. NPCA will make every effort to accommodate plants that need an expedited audit. Please note all plants must be audited within 90 days of application.

Q: How often are audits performed?

A: Audits are performed at each participating plant once per year. Each year 5 percent of the plants participating in the NPCA Plant Certification Program will receive an additional unannounced audit at NPCA's expense as a commitment to quality and continuous improvement for the program.

Q: When are audits performed?

A: Initial audits are scheduled between the plant and the auditor on a mutually convenient date, within the 90-day window from application. Subsequent audits are performed on an unannounced basis, and can occur any time during the year. NPCA makes every effort to avoid scheduling audits during NPCA meetings such as the Annual Convention and NPCA's annual trade show.

Q: Who performs the audits?

A: A representative from an independent engineering firm performs the on-site plant audits. This representative is responsible for scheduling and performing the audit and then providing a report to NPCA detailing the audit findings and grade.

Q: What is required to pass an audit?

A: Audits are performed to verify compliance with the NPCA Quality Control Manual. A standard grading schedule included in the manual is used for all audits. A plant must achieve a score of 80% or better in order to pass.

Q: What should a plant expect during an audit?

A: The auditor will begin the plant's audit in the morning, typically when stripping operations are still being carried out. It is best to designate a plant representative to be the liaison to the auditor during the entire audit process. The auditor will observe typical operations that include all normal production operations and quality control testing. The auditor will also review all required quality control documentation. At the conclusion of the audit, the auditor will conduct an exit interview and will provide immediate feedback (in the form of a preliminary report) with plant representatives regarding initial findings. These meetings usually last about an hour and are conducted casually in order to facilitate positive discussion. This is one of the best opportunities for plant representatives to ask questions and take note of the auditor's positive and constructive comments.

Q: What topics does the Plant Certification Program cover?

A: All of the requirements for the program are clearly described in the NPCA Quality Control Manual for Precast Concrete Plants. The general topics covered include:

- Plant quality control procedures and management policies
- Plant safety
- Concrete, reinforcement and miscellaneous raw materials
- Concrete mixes
- Batching and mixing
- Production practices
- Fabrication of reinforcement and blockouts
- Pre-pour, casting, curing, stripping and repair operations
- Post-pour and final inspections
- Product handling, storage and shipment
- Concrete and aggregate testing
- Quality control recordkeeping



PLANT CERTIFICATION FAQs

Q: What is the best way for a plant to prepare for an audit and become certified?

A: Thoroughly review the NPCA Quality Control Manual. This manual covers all of the requirements for the program and is the basis for the audits. If plant personnel have further questions after reading the manual, they can contact the NPCA Technical Services Department for assistance.

Q: Must a plant be a member of NPCA to participate in the Plant Certification Program?

A: No. A plant need not be a member of the association to be certified. However, it is in the plant's best interest to join NPCA in order to take advantage of the extensive benefits, discounts and technical assistance NPCA has to offer.

Q: What if a precast concrete company has more than one plant?

A: The purpose of the NPCA Plant Certification Program is to certify **individual production facilities**. **If a company has more than one plant within 20 miles of another location, it is eligible for a multi-plant inspection**. If the company decides to move forward with this option, each location will be certified under one contract.

Q: Is there a discount for the multiple-plant inspection option?

A: Yes, there is a discount for the multiple-plant inspection. Depending on each plant's membership status, the plant will be charged the discounted member or non-member rate.

Q: How difficult is it to pass an audit?

A: Passing the audit is not as difficult as you may think. In general, companies that are interested in the Plant Certification Program already have the inherent characteristic found in other successful plants – a commitment to quality. These plants will likely perform very well during an audit, since they are already performing many of the quality control operations required in the NPCA Quality Control Manual.

Q: What is the best indicator that a plant will likely pass an audit?

A: Management's commitment to quality is fundamental for a plant seeking to develop a successful quality assurance/quality control program. Without this commitment, most QA/QC programs will likely fail.

Q: Is it cost effective to be certified?

A: In most cases, yes. Numerous plants have indicated that plant certification actually pays for itself through increased operating efficiencies, reduction of defective and returned products and increased business due to better customer satisfaction. Compared to the cost of other industry certification programs, the NPCA Plant Certification is very inexpensive.

For more information about NPCA's Plant Certification Program please contact Chris Frederick, Senior Director of Technical Services, at (800) 366-7731 or via email at cfrederick@precast.org.

