

NPCA Plant Certification Program Process Updates During the COVID-19 Pandemic

These procedures are in effect June 15, 2020 - Dec. 31, 2020. NPCA will restart 2020 audits on Monday, July 6, 2020. Beginning Jan. 1, 2021, standard operating procedures for the NPCA Plant Certification Program will resume unless otherwise recommended by the NPCA QA/QC Committee and approved by the NPCA Board of Directors.

NPCA staff will document appropriately all procedures and carefully maintain records to ensure compliance with ANSI standards.

Background

Given the overarching impact that the global COVID-19 pandemic has had on the construction industry, travel and day-to-day operations for employers, NPCA's leadership has approved a modified plant audit process. NPCA is committed to ensuring the highest level of integrity and adherence to the NPCA Plant Certification Program, while also protecting our members' employees, our audit firm representatives and our staff's health and safety during these unprecedented times.

Overview

This modified NPCA plant audit process will allow for a portion of 2020 audits to be conducted virtually. All plants, regardless of the type of audit, will be evaluated against the current NPCA Quality Control Manual for Precast Concrete Plants grading schedule.

Plants are responsible for informing NPCA if there are COVID-19-related restrictions for plant visitors (e.g., special PPE requirements, no visitors allowed, shutdowns, limited production, restricted access, etc.). Failure to notify NPCA – well in advance of an audit – of restricted or refused access for visitors may result in the plant being charged for a “refused audit” as outlined in the NPCA Quality Control Manual for Precast Concrete Plants terms and conditions.

In partnership with project owners (e.g., state DOTs and FHWA), and taking into consideration state COVID-19-related travel restrictions – our audit agencies and NPCA will determine which plants will receive virtual or in-person audits. If a plant requests an in-plant audit, NPCA will make every effort to accommodate the request, but cannot guarantee an in-plant audit. Decisions will be made based on the resources available, travel restrictions and program requirements. Plants may not request a virtual audit only.

Technology Needed by Plant for Virtual Audits

NPCA virtual audits will use Zoom, FaceTime or other similar video conferencing services for the virtual audit. Zoom is a widely used video conferencing platform that is available at no cost. FaceTime is available for Apple product users. The plant will need a smartphone and strong Wi-Fi or cellular service for the virtual audit.

If your plant does not meet these technology requirements, please contact Andi Pierce at apierce@precast.org by July 2, 2020.



Process

Virtual Audits for Currently Certified Plants

- Plants will receive a call from the auditor the morning of the unannounced audit.
- The auditor and plant will agree to the video conferencing method for the day (e.g., Zoom, FaceTime, etc.).
- The plant must be accessible to the auditor throughout the day. Plants must provide at least one alternative contact person and phone number to ensure that auditor has access to personnel.
- Virtual audits are anticipated to take between 5-8 hours depending on the size of the plant.
- At the end of the virtual audit, the auditor will review any concerns with plant personnel and answer any questions.
- Plants will receive a preliminary audit report.
- The plant will receive a final copy of its audit report within 30 days of the audit and have 45 days from the date of the audit to respond to any deficiencies.
- Plants must notify NPCA a minimum of 14 calendar days in advance if the plant is shut down or has limited product due to COVID-19-related issues. In the event a COVID-19-related shutdown occurs with less than 14 calendar days' notice, the plant must notify NPCA on the date of shutdown. This is in addition to notifying NPCA in advance of any plant shutdown dates for holidays, vacations, equipment failures, etc. Failure to do so may result in the plant having to pay for an additional audit per the NPCA Plant Certification Program's terms and conditions.

In-Person Audits for Currently Certified Plants

- NPCA will conduct a portion of in-person audits for currently certified plants. These plant audits will follow the same procedure as outlined in the NPCA Plant Certification Program.

Random Re-Inspections for Currently Certified Plants

- As part of NPCA's internal quality control procedures, we conduct random re-inspections of a portion of NPCA Certified Plants. These random re-inspections will be conducted in 2020 and will follow the process for virtual or in-person audits as outlined in this document. NPCA Certified Plants-in-good standing as of Dec. 31, 2019, are subject to a random re-inspection anytime throughout 2020.

Plants New to the NPCA Plant Certification Program

- All plants new to the NPCA Plant Certification Program shall be required to have an in-person audit. These audits will continue to be announced, as are all first-time audits for new plants.
- These plant audits will follow the same procedure as outlined in the NPCA Plant Certification program.
- The plant will be contacted by the auditor in advance to schedule the audit. Additionally, the auditor will verify that the plant does not have any reported recent COVID-19 cases and to verify any special PPE and safety requirements the plant may require for the auditor.



Scoring

Virtual and in-person audits will be scored against the grading schedule in the current NPCA Quality Control Manual for Precast Concrete Plants. The QA/QC Committee acknowledges some modifications will be required to allow the auditor to witness certain production practices virtually. For example, if a plant has a cellular dead zone in the facility where concrete testing is performed, the auditor may allow the plant to video the test and immediately send it to the auditor for review.

Plants will receive a numeric score based on the current grading schedule, and probationary status will be in effect for those plants failing to meet the overall and critical section scoring. See the NPCA Quality Control Manual for Precast Concrete Plants terms and conditions for more information.

Plant Responsiveness

In-person audits will remain the same. The auditor will arrive at the plant unannounced for annual re-inspections.

For virtual audits, the auditor will contact the plant and/or the plant liaison to the auditor the morning of the audit. Plants are asked to provide a minimum of three different accessible plant employees and their phone numbers by July 2, 2020, so that NPCA and auditors have multiple options for contact the day of the audit. Submit the contact information to Andi Pierce at apierce@precast.org.

It is the plant's responsibility to be accessible for a virtual or in-person audit any day Monday through Friday, except for the following dates: July 3, Sept. 7, Oct. 12, Nov. 3, Nov. 26-27 and Dec. 21-31. If your plant will be shut down for additional days, the plant must provide NPCA with a 14-calendar-day advance notice. If a plant is unresponsive to NPCA staff and/or the auditor, the QA Review Subcommittee process will be enacted to determine if the plant shall be decertified per the NPCA Quality Control Manual for Precast Concrete Plants terms and conditions.

Safety

The safety of plant employees, the auditors and NPCA staff is NPCA's top priority. In addition to traditional PPE required by the plants, all auditors will be required to follow all CDC, federal, state and local jurisdiction requirements. If the plant has additional requirements, such as taking a temperature upon arrival, those requirements will be accommodated by the auditor.

For the auditors' safety, plants with a scheduled in-person audit shall be required to notify NPCA immediately if there is a confirmed COVID-19 case or close exposure contact. NPCA will work with the plant and audit agency to reschedule the audit, if appropriate.



Owner and Stakeholder Notification

NPCA will contact state departments of transportation, FHWA, the Department of Veteran Affairs, FAA and other project owners requiring NPCA certification for precast products to make them aware of the modifications to the program for the remainder of 2020. NPCA will partner with project owners who have additional requirements for QA/QC to ensure that any concerns are addressed.

Oversight

DOTs, other project owner stakeholders and NPCA staff may shadow virtual or in-person audits at any time without prior notice to the plant.

Questions

NPCA recognizes these are unprecedented times and wants to ensure that members and stakeholders are fully informed and aware of the temporary changes to NPCA's Plant Certification Program. If you have any questions, please contact Phillip Cutler, director of quality assurance programs, at pcutler@precast.org or (317) 582-2420.

