

PLANT CERTIFICATION FAQs

Q: What is the NPCA Plant Certification Program?

A: The NPCA Plant Certification Program is an exciting way for precast and prestressed 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 and Prestressed 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 or prestressed concrete products. Compliance with the Quality Control Manual is verified through annual inspections 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, including prestressed, are covered in the manual. Typically, NPCA certified plants produce precast and prestressed 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
- Prestressed Concrete 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 inspector enters a plant, he brings with him the experience of observing many other precast and prestressed 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 and prestressed 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/npcaservices/certify/. The inspection agency will then contact the plant to schedule the inspection. During the inspection, plant personnel have the opportunity to accompany the inspector and learn of possible operation and plant improvements. The inspection 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 inspection and notification of results. NPCA will make every effort to accommodate plants that need an expedited inspection. Please note all plants must be inspected within 90 days of application, or 180 days of application if participating in NPCA's voluntary pre-assessment audit program.

Q: How often are inspections performed?

A: Inspections 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 inspection at NPCA's expense as a commitment to quality and continuous improvement for the program.

Q: When are inspections performed?

A: Initial inspections are scheduled between the plant and the inspector on a mutually convenient date, within the 90-day window from application (or 180 days for plants in the voluntary NPCA Pre-assessment audit program). Subsequent inspections are performed on an unannounced basis, and can occur any time during the year. NPCA makes every effort to avoid scheduling inspections during NPCA meetings such as the Annual Convention and NPCA's annual trade show.

Q: Who performs the inspections?

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

Q: What is required to pass an inspection?

A: Inspections are performed to verify compliance with the NPCA Quality Control Manual. A standard grading schedule included in the manual is used for all inspections. A plant must achieve a score of 80% or better (out of a possible 100) in order to pass.

Q: What should a plant expect during an inspection?

A: The inspector 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 inspector during the entire inspection process. The inspector will observe typical operations that include all normal production operations and quality control testing. The inspector will also review all required quality control documentation. At the conclusion of the audit, the inspector will conduct an exit interview and will provide immediate feedback 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 inspector'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 and Prestressed 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 inspection 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 inspections. If plant personnel have further questions after reading the manual, they can contact the NPCA Technical Services Department for assistance.

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 operating in different locations, each plant must apply for certification and receive a separate inspection.

Q: How difficult is it to pass an inspection?

A: Passing the inspection 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 inspection, 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 inspection?

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: 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: 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, Director of Certification and Regulatory Services, at (800) 366-7731 or via email at cfr frederick@precast.org.

