



# IAS FABRICATOR ACCREDITATION ENSURES QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE

“If fabricators meet our accreditation standards, then they meet the code.”— IAS Vice President Pat McCullen

Ask City of Sandy, Utah, Chief Building Official Scott Marsell about the importance of fabricator accreditation and he’ll tell you an oft-repeated story.

“Not long ago, during construction of a particularly large project in Sandy, our building inspectors discovered that 90 percent of the structural steel welds did not meet the code requirements. Construction stopped until the problem could be corrected and reinspected—costing significant project delays, owner dissatisfaction and budget overruns.”

Today, Marsell and his building inspection team require that all fabricators designated on a building plan obtain professional accreditation that includes third-party oversight as defined by the *International Building Code*® (IBC®).

“We’ve never had that welding problem again,” says Marsell. “Now, our builders carefully select fabricators who meet the most stringent building code requirements.”

This type of story is not uncommon. Some assume that fabricator certification by certain entities meets the continuous oversight requirements of the code. However, the truth is that very few certification programs are rigorous enough to handle all of the necessary inspection criteria for critical building components assembled at a fabricator’s facility as well as ensure code compliance.

“Independent of the product, there are a dozen different elements that drive the quality fabrication of assembly parts at a facility,” observes International Accreditation Service, Inc. (IAS) Vice President Pat McCullen. “Many building departments simply don’t have the staff to inspect these facilities properly. That’s where we can help.”

The IAS Fabricator Accreditation Program is a robust, ongoing program that meets the requirements of Section 1704.2.2 of the IBC and Section 1701.7 of the *Uniform Building Code*.

“This program is designed to help building departments fulfill their oversight responsibilities while ensuring that the code requirements are enforced,” McCullen notes. “Bottom line: if fabricators meet our accreditation standards, then they meet the code.”

## Meeting a Need

For some jurisdictions, the availability of industry-driven accreditation has become an essential element of a comprehensive building inspection program. Las Vegas, Nevada—where construction activity barrels along at a staggering pace in order to accommodate the 6,000-plus people who move into the area each month—is one example.

“We used to certify fabricators ourselves, along with our other building and safety activities such as inspections, plan reviews and the like,” recalls City of Las Vegas Building and Safety Department Inspections Manager Earl Russell. “That’s just not possible anymore.”

“With our demand, we’d have to support an entire fabricator certification division to keep up,” he explains. “Instead, we require that all of our fabricators have certification from a recognized agency such as IAS. This allows us the assurance that our fabricators meet stringent code requirements. Better yet, we can then reallocate the resources that would have been on certification to support other building department needs and keep our customer service high.”

## Meeting the Standards

The IAS Fabricator Accreditation Program currently offers accreditation services for reinforced concrete, precast concrete, structural steel and wood wall panel assemblies. There are four major elements involved in achieving and maintaining IAS accreditation:

- documentation,
- verification,
- confirmation and
- notification.

For a fabricator, one of the first steps in achieving IAS accreditation is to develop and submit a detailed fabrication procedural manual that references key quality control procedures as outlined in the applicable IAS Fabrication Accreditation criteria. This manual provides a basis for internal quality management and inspection of workmanship at the fabrication facility.

After review of these procedures, the fabricator must successfully undergo an initial onsite inspection conducted jointly by IAS staff members and representatives of an IAS-accredited inspection agency. IAS also requires that key staff in all accredited fabricator inspection programs meet specific personnel guidelines. For instance, fabricators must have a Certified Welding Inspector on staff and all welders must comply with American Welding Society standards verified by an independent third party.

“It’s not enough to have the written policy—we want to see the plan in action,” says IAS Accreditation Officer Sandi McCracken. “This joint assessment verifies that the fabricator is competent to do the work. It also verifies that the fabricator’s quality management system is fully implemented.”

Finally, the fabricator must undergo quarterly, unannounced inspections by an IAS-accredited inspection agency. These inspections serve to confirm that the fabricator continues to operate in accordance with the procedural manual and that work complies with plans and specifications. The fabricator must notify IAS and the accredited inspection agency whenever there is a change to the documented quality system or a change in key personnel or equipment at the fabrication facility.

“Programs like this are a real luxury for a city building department,” says City of Garden Grove, California, Building Services Manager Jim Martin. “I don’t have to set up a custom criterion to evaluate fabricators. Instead, I know that if our designated building fabricators meet the stringent accreditation requirements such as those outlined by IAS and show certification, then we have confidence to move forward.”

### Finding IAS-Accredited Fabricators

Visitors to [www.iasonline.org](http://www.iasonline.org) can download the complete list of accredited fabricators or search for an individual company by category. For more information about IAS’s Fabricator Accreditation Program and other services, go to the web site or call 1-866-427-4422.

## Delivering Quality

How do fabricators feel about the IAS accreditation process? According to VP Building Systems, headquartered in Memphis, Tennessee, it’s the way business should be done.

VP Building Systems manufactures pre-engineered, nonresidential, low-rise steel buildings for global manufacturing, warehouse, school and commercial applications. Several years ago, the firm required each of its six manufacturing facilities located in the U.S. and Mexico to have IAS Fabricator Accreditation for structural steel fabrication. Each facility spent approximately six months refining its internal quality system to meet the tight requirements and all VP fabricators have maintained IAS accreditation since 2002.

Calvin Riggins, Quality Assurance Manager for VP Building Systems’ Arkansas-based facility, sees the program’s stringent audit requirements as an asset. “The IAS is the only one that requires quarterly third-party audits of fabricator facilities,” he says. “I like that—it allows me to continually stress quality management to our manufacturing team, it gives me the backing I need to push for the best. I know when our products roll out the door we can guarantee builders that we are delivering top quality.”

## Building Momentum

The widespread adoption of the *International Codes*<sup>®</sup> has made it more important than ever that fabricators be able to satisfy building officials that their assemblies meet code requirements. While some building departments are able to maintain a staff of engineering specialists qualified to review fabricator abilities, most are not. That is why more and more building officials are placing the responsibility on fabricators by requiring them to maintain independent accreditation of their processes and final products.

IAS accreditation programs benefit everyone—building departments, fabricators, engineers, specifiers and especially members of the community, who depend on the buildings they live and work in to be safe and secure. ♦

