

City of Las Vegas Building and Safety Selects IAS to Approve Special Inspection Agencies



Building departments look to special inspection agencies for assessment of critical building elements from concrete, to soil studies, to the evaluation of post-installed anchors. Of course, such agencies must meet minimum standards for competence. Many building departments previously relied on in-house-developed criteria to assess special inspection agencies, but this has become increasingly difficult in the face of escalating workloads. Take Las Vegas, for example. The city and surrounding areas welcome approximately 6,000 new residents each month and the city currently monitors some 35 different special inspection agencies.

“Not long ago, we really struggled to keep our heads above water,” recalls City of Las Vegas, Nevada, Building and Safety Department Inspections Manager Earl Russell.

In 2004, the growing strain on his department’s resources prompted Russell to ask IAS to develop a national standard for special inspection agency evaluation. The result is the IBC Special Inspection Agency Accreditation program, a unique program aimed at assuring building departments that special inspection agencies are fully competent to determine whether construction meets the material and workmanship requirements of the code.

Defining a Common Standard

The IBC Special Inspection Agency Accreditation program is based on the requirements of the IBC and applicable portions of ISO/IEC Standard 17020, *General Requirements for the Operation of Various Bodies Performing Inspection*.

An inspection agency takes its first step toward accreditation by submitting an application along with documentation of its quality management system showing compliance with the IAS Accreditation Criteria for IBC Special Inspection Agencies. This documentation must include basic data such as the agency’s experience and qualifications and the scope of its inspection activities, including applicable inspection standards, as well as a matrix matching inspector qualifications with the scope of the agency’s activities. Training, education, experience, certification requirements and the agency’s procedures for monitoring its special inspectors must also be formally documented. Further, documented policies and procedures must be in place for the conduction of safe and competent inspections, the calibration of test/inspection equipment showing traceability to an accredited calibration provider, and the resolution of inspection discrepancies.

If the submitted documentation is approved, an onsite assessment is conducted by specially trained IAS assessors who review the special inspection agency’s inspection records and overall system make-up and interview staff members. In addition, IAS technical assessors or subject-matter experts conduct field assessments at construction sites to evaluate the technical competence of the agency’s inspectors.

“Accreditation and competence go hand-in-hand,” observes IAS Vice President Pat McCullen. “Not only do these agencies have to provide the written verification that the policies and procedures are in place, but they must demonstrate expertise in the field, on the job.”





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Once an inspection agency has satisfied IAS accreditation requirements, an accreditation certificate is issued. Maintenance of the agency’s quality management system is monitored thereafter through periodic on site surveillance assessments and feedback from regulators.

“This is in fact more stringent than our in-house evaluation program,” says Russell. “Better yet, it takes the burden off of us to make sure that our special inspection agencies are regularly assessed for quality and competence.”

Today, the City of Las Vegas Building and Safety Department requires that all special inspection agencies earn IBC Special Inspection Agency Accreditation before they can do business with the city.

A Range of Benefits

Since its introduction in mid-2005, the IBC Special Inspection Agency Accreditation program has garnered substantial interest from building departments and special inspection agencies across the country, and dozens of special inspection agencies are currently in the process of earning accreditation.

Las Vegas-based GeoTek, Inc. (GTI)—a provider of environmental, geotechnical and construction materials engineering and testing services throughout the southwestern U.S.—is one of the first special inspection agencies to achieve IAS accreditation.

“The best part about this process is that it allowed us to review our current program with an eye on improvement,” says GTI Vice President and Materials Department Manager Stephen R. Johnson, PG. “In fact, we enacted several beneficial procedures to meet these requirements and help us provide better service to our clients.”

“We’ve had some unexpected benefits,” adds Johnson. “Accreditation has also helped us qualify with a nationally based client that typically requires agencies to follow a client-

defined internal process for assessment. Because of the accreditation, we developed a relationship with this client and were able to stand out from our competitors. I believe our accreditation also

had an indirect effect in developing other qualification-based proposals, and ultimately the IAS accreditation helps with this process.”

In addition, it is expected that the IBC Special Inspection Agency Accreditation program will help building departments standardize their special inspection agency requirements, which will benefit jurisdictions and special inspection agencies alike.

IAS OFFERS SPECIAL INSPECTION AGENCY ACCREDITATION IN THE FOLLOWING FIELDS:

- ▶ concrete construction (prestressed and reinforced)
 - ▶ nondestructive testing
- ▶ pier foundations ▶ pile foundations
- ▶ post-installed structural anchors in concrete
 - ▶ sprayed fire-resistant materials
 - ▶ steel (bolting and welding)
- ▶ structural masonry construction
- ▶ structural wood construction
- ▶ soils ▶ special cases.

“It has definitely worked for us,” says Russell. “Today, we’re confident that our special inspection agencies meet national requirements, assuring us that our rapidly growing infrastructure is built to the tightest code standard of the day.”

IAS-accredited special inspection agencies and their scopes of accreditation—as well as accredited testing laboratories, calibration laboratories and fabricator inspection programs—are listed on the IAS web site, which is located at www.iasonline.org.



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