

How does accredited inspection benefit government and regulators?



global trust
Testing – Calibration – Inspection



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Government bodies and regulators are constantly called upon to make decisions related to:

- Protecting the health and welfare of consumers and the public
- Protecting the environment
- Developing new regulations and requirements
- Measuring compliance with regulatory and legal requirements

In order to make informed decisions, there must be a level of confidence that the results produced by inspection bodies are accurate, reliable and impartial. Using an accredited inspection body can help establish and assure this confidence.

When an inspection body is accredited by a recognised accreditation body, it has demonstrated that a prescribed level of technical competence to perform specific types of inspection activities has been achieved.

Accreditation provides assurance that the inspection body is capable of producing results that can be relied upon by government to meet their regulatory and legislative responsibilities. Using an accredited inspection body benefits government and regulators by:

- Increasing confidence in inspection related information used to support policy decisions and action plans
- Providing government with an independent (third party) attestation that is based on an internationally recognised standard
- Reducing uncertainties associated with decisions that affect the protection of human health and the environment
- Increasing public confidence, because accreditation is a recognisable mark of approval
- Eliminating duplicate inspections and improving the efficiency of the assessment process (which may reduce costs)

Using accredited inspection bodies also facilitates trade and economic growth. The accreditation process relies on a uniform approach to confirming inspection body competence – an approach that has been accepted and implemented across many borders. The ILAC Inspection Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA), which was signed in 2012, is based on internationally agreed and accepted inspection practices.

Inspection reports generated by accredited inspection bodies can facilitate acceptance of goods between economies. This saves money as it reduces or eliminates the need for repeat inspections.



What is inspection?

“Inspection” is an essential part of ensuring the operational safety of many items that the public use in their daily lives. Safety of food is a prime example, as are cranes, boilers and pressure vessels used in the workplace. The competence of inspection services employed by local and national authorities and other organisations to ensure regulatory requirements are being met is often assured by accreditation.

Inspection is the examination of a design, product, service, process or installation; and determining their conformity with specific requirements. Many types of inspection also involve professional judgement for conformance against standards and general requirements. Inspection bodies must demonstrate, to an accreditation body, that they have the necessary competence to perform the specified tasks before they can achieve accreditation.

There is a close relationship between inspection, testing and measurement. Inspection involves examinations by competent personnel using techniques such as:

- Visual examination
- Visual comparison with standards (e.g. colour matching)
- Dimensional checks
- Examination using gauges and instruments.

Examples of activities which benefit from accreditation include inspection of pressure equipment, cranes and passenger ropeways, inspection of offshore structures for oil and gas exploration and production, mechanical equipment inspection, non-destructive testing, inspection of meat, dairy products and other food production, bio-security and border control inspections, to name a few.

The criteria used by signatories of the ILAC Inspection Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) for accrediting inspection bodies is the Standard ISO/IEC 17020 *Conformity assessment – requirements for the various types of bodies performing inspection*.



How does accreditation work?

Inspection bodies can have either all or part of their inspection activities accredited. The assessment process involves the use of technical specialists who assess the specific types of inspection being performed. The assessment criteria are based on the international standard ISO/IEC 17020, which is used for assessing inspection bodies throughout the world and involves a thorough examination of all the elements of an inspection body that contribute to the production of accurate and reliable inspection reports, including consideration of the following:


- technical competence of staff (including qualifications, training and experience)
- appropriateness of inspection methods
- the use of suitable equipment (properly calibrated and maintained)
- safeguards to ensure impartiality and confidentiality
- code of conduct and processes for working safely
- effective quality assurance procedures

Inspection body accreditation uses criteria and procedures specifically developed to determine technical competence. Specialist technical assessors conduct a thorough evaluation of all factors in an inspection body's operation that affect the production of reliable inspection results.

At the end of the assessment by an accreditation body, a detailed report is presented to the inspection body, highlighting any areas that require attention and corrective action before the inspection body can be recommended for accreditation.

Once accredited, the inspection body is regularly re-assessed to ensure its continued compliance with requirements, and to check that its standard of operation is being maintained.

All these factors contribute to an inspection body being technically competent to undertake specific inspection activities.



How can you tell if an inspection body is accredited?

Accredited inspection bodies are authorised to issue inspection reports or certificates bearing some type of symbol or endorsement indicating their accreditation. Users of inspection services should also check with the inspection body what specific inspections they are accredited to do. This is normally specified in their Scope of Accreditation, which may be supplied by the inspection body upon request and is normally listed on the accreditation body's website.

What if the inspection body has ISO 9001 certification?

Inspection bodies can be audited and certified to an international management systems standard called ISO 9001. This standard is widely used in manufacturing and service organisations to evaluate their systems for managing the quality of their products or services. Certification of an organisation's quality management systems against ISO 9001 aims at confirming the compliance of the management system to this standard, but does not specify requirements for technical competence and impartiality.



Enhancing the acceptance of products and services across national borders

Accreditation bodies around the world, which have been evaluated by peers as competent, have signed an arrangement that enhances the acceptance of products and services across national borders. The purpose of this arrangement, the ILAC Inspection Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA), is to create an international framework to support international trade through the removal of technical barriers.

The MRA acts as an internationally recognised 'stamp of approval' to demonstrate compliance against agreed standards and requirements. Consequently, risk is minimised, as decisions are based on reliable inspection reports. Duplication is also minimised as inspection reports included in submissions for product approvals can be accepted with confidence without re-inspection. Many specifiers, such as government agencies, have recognised the importance of credible accreditation programs that are developed against internationally recognised standards. Accreditation and the ILAC MRA help regulators meet their own legislated responsibilities by providing a globally recognised system for accepting accredited inspection reports.



Where can I get more information?

For more information on accredited inspection bodies, you will need to contact your ILAC recognised accreditation body. To find out if your economy has one or more inspection accreditation bodies, visit the website of the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) at **www.ilac.org** and use the directory of accreditation bodies available on this website.

More information about ILAC

ILAC is the peak international authority on laboratory and inspection accreditation, with a membership consisting of accreditation bodies and stakeholder organisations throughout the world. Its internet site at **www.ilac.org** can provide a range of information on laboratory and inspection accreditation, as well as the location of its members world-wide.

For more information contact:

The ILAC Secretariat

PO Box 7507

Silverwater

NSW 2128

Australia

Fax: +61 2 9736 8373

Email: ilac@nata.com.au

Website: www.ilac.org

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