

How do I gain confidence in an Inspection Body? Do they need ISO 9001 certification or ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation?



*Accreditation:
Delivering Global Confidence*

What should I look for when I have an Inspection need?

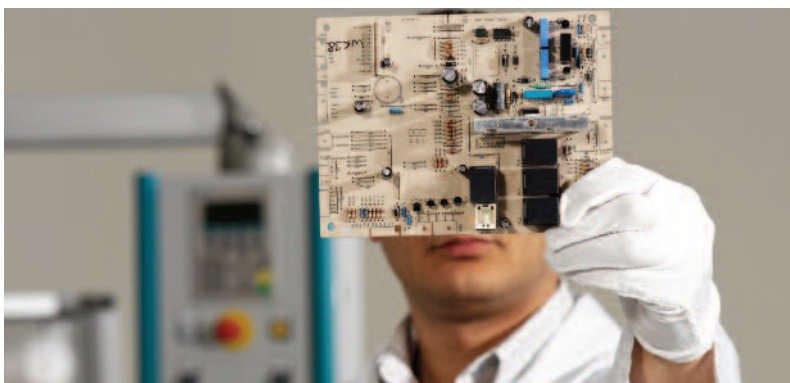
Many companies provide inspection services, sometimes at what appears to be low cost. However, before commissioning an organisation to undertake such work, it is important to consider the risks:

- Are you confident that the organisation has the technical competence to undertake the work in question?
- Are you satisfied that the organisation has the resources to do the work?
- Are your needs for impartiality and integrity met by the application of suitable procedures in the organisation?
- Are you confident that the organisation has an adequate quality management system in place to provide a service that consistently meets your needs and expectations?

The technical competence of an inspection body depends on a number of factors including:

- staff with sound knowledge, skills, experience and professional judgement
- the right equipment – properly maintained and, where necessary, calibrated
- appropriate sampling practices
- sound inspection procedures
- accurate recording and reporting of evidence and inspection results
- adequate quality assurance and quality control

When selecting a supplier to fulfil your inspection needs, you need to be confident that the Inspection Body can supply you with a technically competent service and with consistently reliable results.



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How do I gain confidence in an Inspection Body?

An inspection body may reassure you that they have the necessary attributes by way of their experience and reputation (this is called first party or self-declaration), or you can attempt to evaluate their competence yourself (this is called a second party audit).

Self-declaration and second party auditing are widely used and accepted forms of gaining confidence in a particular product, service or process. However, organisations have found that significant time, resources and costs are spent auditing or being audited. Consequently, third party or independent assessment has, in the majority of cases, become the acceptable cost effective alternative to all parties.

ISO 9001 certification or ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation?

In the case of an inspection body there are two independent options that can provide confidence to you and other interested parties:

- accreditation of the inspection body's competence to carry out the specific inspection tasks using ISO/IEC 17020, or
- certification of the inspection body's quality management system using ISO 9001. These standards are related to each other through the management system requirements and are relevant in gaining confidence in the results produced by an inspection body.

Accreditation to ISO/IEC 17020 *"Conformity assessment -- Requirements for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection"* involves an independent accreditation body assessing an inspection body's competence to carry out specific inspection activities. The focus of ISO/IEC 17020 is on the independence, impartiality and integrity of the inspection body and the competence of its people, its inspection processes, and its equipment. In addition, the standard also includes a requirement for the inspection body to maintain a quality management system. The general criteria of ISO/IEC 17020 are supplemented by a variety of ILAC and IAF/ILAC documents and specific scheme requirements.



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Certification to ISO 9001 (*"Quality management systems – Requirements"*) is carried out by an independent management system auditing organization with the purpose of certifying the inspection body's quality management system. The main focus of the audit is the organizational and operational aspects that allow the inspection body to provide a service that consistently meets customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements. Part of the quality management system includes the inspection body's ability to ensure that its people, processes and equipment are able to meet customer requirements.

These management system auditing organizations (generally called certification bodies) can themselves also choose to be accredited (using ISO/IEC 17021-1 *"Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems"*) in order to provide their clients and other interested parties with added confidence in their competence to provide certification. ISO 9001 is, however, a generic standard that can be applied to all organizations, regardless of the type, size, or service provided. It can therefore be applied to, but is not specific for, organizations that provide inspection services.

More information about why you should look for bodies that have been certified by an accredited certification body if you choose the ISO 9001 certification route can be found in the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) document: *"Why use an accredited certification body?"*, and on ISO 9001 in the document: *"Expected Outcomes for Accredited Certification to ISO Management Systems Standards Such as ISO 9001 and ISO 14001"*, both available at www.iaf.nu.

Accredited ISO 9001 certification and accreditation to ISO/IEC 17020 both provide confidence in the services of an inspection body. ISO/IEC 17020 is however more specific in its requirements for technical competence and impartiality while still addressing the quality management system requirements needed to ensure inspection bodies provide consistent and reliable inspection services that will meet customer needs.



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How can accreditation of an inspection body by an ILAC MRA Signatory provide confidence?

Most economies around the world have one or more accreditation bodies responsible for the accreditation of inspection bodies to the ISO/IEC 17020 standard. These accreditation bodies may be part of government, established by government, or have been formally recognised by government or private entities.

ILAC Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) members provide accreditation services in accordance with the international standard ISO/IEC 17011 Conformity assessment – Requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies. This ensures a consistent approach to the assessment and accreditation of inspection bodies.

ILAC MRA Signatories are required to use ISO/IEC 17020 as the general criteria for the accreditation of inspection bodies. ISO/IEC 17020 specifically addresses factors relevant to an inspection body's ability to produce reliable and defensible inspection results, including:

- technical competence of staff;
- validity and appropriateness of inspection methods;
- suitability and maintenance of inspection equipment;
- where necessary, traceability of measurements;
- sampling, handling and identification of inspected items;
- quality assurance of inspection data, inspection reports and certificates.

To ensure continued compliance, accredited inspection bodies are regularly re-assessed to ensure they are keeping pace with technical and regulatory changes in their area of expertise, are maintaining their standards of work and can continue to demonstrate practical competence and sound judgement.



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How can you tell if an Inspection Body is accredited?

Accredited inspection bodies are able to issue inspection reports or certificates bearing the symbol of the accreditation body that provides the accreditation.

As an inspection body gains ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation for specific inspections, you should check that the inspection body is accredited for the inspections you need. This detail is specified in the Scope of Accreditation, which may be supplied by the inspection body or the accreditation body on request.

Accreditation bodies publish on-line lists or directories of the inspection bodies they have accredited, together with contact details and information on their accredited inspection capabilities. You can therefore contact the accreditation body and find out whether there are any accredited inspection bodies that can perform the inspections you require.

To find out if your country has one or more accreditation bodies involved in the accreditation of inspection bodies, you can visit the ILAC website (ilac.org) and use the ILAC MRA signatory search, which is searchable by economy. You will also find, in most cases, links to the directories of accredited inspection bodies on this website.

Alternatively, try contacting your National Standards Body or your Ministry for Industry or technology for the necessary contact details.



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About ILAC

ILAC is the international authority on laboratory, inspection body, proficiency testing provider, reference material producer and biobank accreditation, with a membership consisting of accreditation bodies and affiliated organisations throughout the world.

www.ilac.org provides a range of information on these accreditation activities, as well as the location of its members worldwide.

ILAC promotes the increased use and acceptance by industry as well as government of the results from accredited laboratories, inspection bodies, proficiency testing providers and reference material producers including results from accredited organisations in other countries. ILAC liaises with many international bodies and stakeholders to achieve shared objectives.



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About IAF

IAF is a global association of accreditation bodies, conformity assessment body associations and other organizations involved in conformity assessment in fields including validation/verification and the certification of management systems, products, processes, services and persons.

IAF promotes the worldwide acceptance of certificates of conformity and validation/verification statements issued by conformity assessment bodies accredited by IAF MLA signatories, and seeks to add value for all stakeholders through its activities and programs.



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