

SSPC Coating Applicator Specialist Certification Program (CAS): Workforce Development for the 21st Century

Introduction

Like many trades, an aging workforce whose knowledge and skill cannot be easily replicated challenges the industrial painting sector. According to the 2006 Workforce Summit held at SSPC, the average age of painters is now in excess of 50 years and not enough new workers are entering the field to replace them as they retire or move into administrative positions. Thus continued training of the existing workforce and recruitment of future workers through a variety of training programs and delivery methods is crucial for the industry.

Current training available includes that provided by such organizations as the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT), SSPC, the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER), the Williamson Free School, and the Institute of Corrosion in the UK.

Along with the various other industry groups, SSPC recognizes that the industrial painting trade has become a highly technical profession and the need for a successful “knowledge transfer” to the next generation of qualified craft workers is greater than ever. In 2008, SSPC and NACE jointly published ACS-1/NACE 13, a consensus standard that spells out the criteria for programs that certify individual industrial painters to the highest standard of craftsmanship. Based on this standard, SSPC created the new “Industrial Coating and Lining Application Specialist Qualification and Certification Program” (CAS) in August 2009. This program is meant to jump-start the lengthy process toward certification of the painter workforce by addressing the education, training, experience, and knowledge required to prepare and apply protective coatings to steel and concrete surfaces.

Applicator Train-the-Trainer

The SSPC Train-the-Trainer program established in 2007 provides contractors with a mechanism for bringing worker training home so it can be done at the convenience and need of the contractor. Training in the core topics of corrosion, surface preparation, abrasive materials, coating materials, application methods, process control, and safety is available. During Train-the-Trainer, contractor trainers attend a two-day program that reviews the SSPC Level I and Level II applicator curriculum via lectures and team exercises. The trainer course concludes with two short Level II exams, one covering surface preparation and one covering coating application. Trainers completing this “Train-the-Trainer” session are then qualified by SSPC to return to their facilities to teach the SSPC applicator curriculum to their workers and document this training.

Level II specialty training modules about high and ultrahigh pressure waterjetting, plural component spray, coating concrete, thermal spray, pipeline coatings, electrostatic spray,

and powder coatings are also available as supplements to the Train-the-Trainer training that SSPC has developed for contractors to purchase to train their own workers.

While SSPC's curriculum described here features classroom and show-and-tell training, it focuses heavily on hands-on training so that workers get an immediate feel for how to use the tools of the trade properly. The hands-on training reinforces the theoretical training gained in the classroom.

SSPC CAS Program

SSPC's CAS program represents a transition plan that will prepare the protective coatings industry for the day in which the national infrastructure is in place for standardized apprenticeships and training programs. This is in line with SSPC's conservative estimate that it will take the industry ten years (until 2010) to develop a significant group of trained and qualified industrial painters meeting the criteria of ACS-1/NACE 13 and the needs of owners.

CAS serves as a mechanism for national and third party professional recognition for certified applicators. The two-part approach involves an interim program that began in 2008 and full implementation in 8-12 years. The "Interim Certification Program" allows those in the current workforce the opportunity to realistically achieve certification during the next several years. Craft workers who have fewer hours of formal training and experience than specified in the SSPC/NACE standard can test out for certification. Those craft workers meeting the eligibility requirements for "interim" certification (minimum of 150 hours of formal training and at least 2,000 hours of work experience) will still be required to pass a rigorous written examination and undergo a thorough hands-on skills assessment in industrial painting and blast cleaning to assess competency.

SSPC Interim Application Specialist Certification is valid for a maximum of two three-year terms or 6 years. Those wishing to renew their application specialist certification after completing the second term must take a "Full Status" written exam in order to transfer certification status from "interim" to "full."

SSPC believes that this qualification and certification program is a feasible means of helping to develop a highly qualified workforce sooner rather than later. This will improve quality on the job in the here and now by giving contractors access to more qualified workers. Applicator training delivered through the SSPC Applicator Train-the-Trainer and the Applicator Training Basics e-course as well as through IUPAT and other training providers such as NCCER meets the immediate need for workforce development while working toward the long-term certification goal.

CAS Implementation into QP 1

In 2009, SSPC made the decision to implement CAS certification requirements into the SSPC-QP 1 contractor certification program.

This initiative required two key actions: (1) reactivate the C.3.5 Applicator Prequalification Technical Committee in order to amend the SSPC-QP 1 standard to allow incorporation of CAS certification into the standard; and (2) convene a special PCCP Advisory Committee Task Group to develop recommendations to the SSPC staff and Board of Governors on how to best implement CAS requirements into the QP 1 administrative certification program. The ultimate goal being to have QP 1 certified contractors demonstrate compliance with CAS program requirements within a reasonable time frame.

Balloting closed on the QP 1 standard revision on February 7 with no outstanding negative votes. The standard will next go to the Standards Review Committee for final technical review and then to the Board of Governors (BOG) for approval to publish. BOG approval is slated for May.

PCCP Advisory Committee TG Recommendations

The PCCP Advisory Committee TG completed its work and submitted its recommendations to the SSPC staff in January 2010. At the 2010 Advisory committee meeting in Phoenix AZ, the committee's recommendations were discussed with SSPC staff. As a result of these discussions, SSPC developed an implementation plan for submission to the SSPC BOG at its September 2011 meeting in Pittsburgh Pa.

Every effort was made to incorporate the recommendations of task group along with comments from the 2010 Advisory Committee meetings into the implementation plan. The attached matrix details issues raised and their disposition within the CAS QP 1 Implementation Plan. Also attached is a summary of the 10-year implementation timetable.

Current Status

Although the requirements of the SSPC Transition Plan and the subsequent "Implementation Plan" may not be entirely acceptable to some, they are the currently approved documents developed through consensus and leave little latitude regarding their use and implementation.

To be sure there are still some areas that which need further development and the SSPC is requesting input from the PCCP Advisory Committee Task Group on such issues as the definition of a "crew," and determining what is acceptable training other than that provided by SSPC or the IUPAT.

2013 Implementation

The implementation time table calls for QP 1 certified contractors to begin having at least one certified applicator on each "eligible" industrial painting project as described in the Implementation Plan time table.

And although the requirements of the implementation plan take effect Jan 2013, SSPC is committed to working with the certified contractors to help them transition the CAS Implementation into their operations. SSPC will treat deficiencies regarding CAS requirements noted during 2012 audits as informational for the first 12 months, provided the contractor has developed an execution plan to be submitted to the SSPC Certification Manager by 15 Jan 2012 and is making a reasonable effort to comply through calendary year 2012. As stated earlier, QP 1 certified contractors will be required to be in full conformance beginning in January 2013.

Scheduling a CAS Exam

Contact Jennifer Merck (email: merck@sspc.org. Phone: 1/877-281-7772 Ext. 2221) to schedule a CAS exam through SSPC. If scheduling an exam through the IUPAT, contact the Finishing Trades Institute (FTI) at 410/564-5850.