

Welder Qualification vs. Certification and AWS Certified Welders (CW)

There is much confusion about the difference between qualification and certification and many individuals and institutions think that “certification” of welders is required by welding codes.

Nowhere in any welding code (AWS D1.1, ASME Section IX (and others), API 1104, etc.) is there a requirement for “certification” of welders. All codes require “qualification” of welders by performance and testing of a weldment on a specific material using a specific welding process, test position, etc. following a Weld Procedure Specification (WPS). The record of the test results, known as the Welder Qualification Test Record (WQTR) is the essential documentation (signed by a qualified or certified inspector) required for a welder to be deemed qualified to weld in production according to a code.

If certification is desired, a wallet card can be issued that attests to qualification of the cardholder in the process, materials, positions, etc. permitted by the code to which they were tested. Thus, the certification of someone is merely the verification, by the issuance of a certificate or card, that the welder is qualified and to what he is qualified. Since most codes also require continuity (welding in the process qualified at least once on the last six months) to maintain qualification, maintaining qualification is dependent on documenting that activity.

Only candidates who go through our Accredited Test Facilities (ATF) get AWS welder certifications. After the candidate takes his/her test at an ATF, the ATF conducts visual inspections and the tests required (typically bend samples or X-ray). The resident or contract CWI inspects the weldment prior to sectioning, inspects all test samples, and then determines if the weldment passes the qualification criteria stipulated in the code. The WPS and WQTR records are then sent to AWS where they are verified and filed, and a wallet card is issued. All AWS certifications are good for six months, at which time a welder is required to renew and prove his continuing welding activity for which he is qualified.

At no time is an independent CWI who is not contracted with an AWS ATF permitted to conduct qualification tests for issuance of an AWS CW (Certified Welder) card and number. All AWS CW applicants must have undergone qualification test(s) at an AWS ATF by a CWI employed by the ATF or under contract with the ATF. All legitimate AWS CWs are issued certification cards by AWS directly with an AWS-assigned CW number verifiable at our online QuickCheck site at http://www.aws.org/certification/cw_search.html .

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