

Study Session

3

General Exam Approved Agencies

OBJECTIVE: To describe the purpose of various agencies in the special inspection process.

REFERENCE: Sections 1703 and 1704, 2018 IBC; *Special Inspection Manual*, 2018 edition

KEY POINTS:

- What is an approved agency?
- Who employs a special inspection agency or special inspector?
- What are the minimum qualifications of a special inspector?
- What access must a contractor provide for the special inspector?
- What does it mean for a fabricator to be approved?
- When is special inspection required?

Code Text: *An approved agency shall provide all information as necessary for the building official to determine that the agency meets the applicable requirements specified in Sections 1703.1.1 through 1703.1.3. An approved agency shall be objective, competent and independent from the contractor responsible for the work being inspected. The agency shall disclose to the building official and the registered design professional in responsible charge possible conflicts of interest so that objectivity can be confirmed. An approved agency shall have adequate equipment to perform required tests. The equipment shall be periodically calibrated. An approved agency shall employ experienced personnel educated in conducting, supervising and evaluating tests and special inspections.*

Discussion and Commentary: To receive approval from the building official, a special inspection agency, testing laboratory or third-party inspection agency must show that they are competent for the work to be performed. Competency is assessed by experience and potentially by certification. An agency submits proof that employees have experience and knowledge of the special inspections required for the particular project for which they are applying for approval to perform special inspections. Agencies must also show independence from contractors and other potential conflicts of interest by providing information on contractual obligations to the owner or owner's agent.



For building department approval, agencies submit documents showing competency in performing special inspections as well as independence from the contractor.

Code Text: *Where application is made to the building official for construction as specified in Section 105, the owner or the owner's authorized agent, other than the contractor, shall employ one or more approved agencies to provide special inspections and tests during construction on the types of work specified in Section 1705 and identify the approved agencies to the building official. These special inspections and tests are in addition to the inspections by the building official that are identified in Section 110.*

Exceptions:

- 1. Special inspections and tests are not required for construction of a minor nature or as warranted by conditions in the jurisdiction as approved by the building official.*
- 2. Unless otherwise required by the building official, special inspections and tests are not required for Group U occupancies that are accessory to a residential occupancy including, but not limited to, those listed in Section 312.1.*
- 3. Special inspections and tests are not required for portions of structures designed and constructed in accordance with the cold-formed steel light-frame construction provisions of Section 2211.1.2 or the conventional light-frame construction provisions of Section 2308.*
- 4. The contractor is permitted to employ the approved agencies where the contractor is also the owner.*

Discussion and Commentary: A building department does not hire special inspectors. The special inspector is hired and paid by the owner. The *International Building Code*® (IBC®) does not allow the contractor to hire or pay a special inspector (Section 1704.2) as this is a conflict of interest for the contractor and the inspector. The owner can designate another person to oversee the special inspector, but that person may not be the contractor.

To receive building department approval, a special inspection agency must show independence from the contractor. This means a special inspection agency is hired by the owner, an engineering firm or an architectural firm. The special inspection agencies should ideally be identified to the building official before all work begins but must be identified before work on the section of the project requiring special inspection begins. This allows the agency time to research the project and work scope before it begins the special inspection tasks.

This section also explicitly states that special inspections are in addition to building department inspections and do not replace them. This can become confusing for the contractor when both the building department inspections and special inspections are done by third parties. Before work begins, the contractor needs to determine who will represent the building department and give approval for continuation to the next stage of the project.

There are cases where special inspection is not required, such as where construction is minor or a light-frame building has no engineer or architect on the project and the building department approves the construction documents without requiring special inspection.

(continued on next page)



Special inspections are in addition to building department inspections.

Code Text: *Prior to the start of the construction, the approved agencies shall provide written documentation to the building official demonstrating the competence and relevant experience or training of the special inspectors who will perform the special inspections and tests during construction. Experience or training shall be considered to be relevant where the documented experience or training is related in type and complexity to the special inspection or testing activities. This means the projects need to be of similar complexity and material qualities. These qualifications are in addition to qualifications specified in other sections of this code.*

The registered design professional in responsible charge and engineers of record involved in the design of the project are permitted to act as the approved agency and their personnel are permitted to act as special inspectors for the work designed by them, provided they qualify as special inspectors.

Discussion and Commentary: Special inspectors check the details of construction against submitted plans, codes and standards. Special inspectors review the fine detail of designated portions of the structure, while jurisdictional inspectors review all the elements of the construction project for general compliance.

The special inspector is to be qualified and should demonstrate his or her qualifications for the type of construction requiring special inspection to the satisfaction of the building official. As failure to properly construct a building can result directly in loss of life or property, a special inspector must know both the code requirements for adequate construction and be competent in recognizing construction practices, following both the approved plans and all applicable code requirements.

Typically, special inspectors have many years of experience in the discipline for which they are certified. Many have been contractors and others have spent years designing and observing unusual methods of construction. Practical field experience, combined with blueprint reading and excellent communication skills, are an absolute requirement for this profession. Knowledge of the code only adds to experience already gained through practice.

While the IBC allows the registered design professional to act as an approved agency, any personnel doing special inspection must have the practical field experience to recognize whether ongoing construction practices will lead to structures built following the approved plans and all pertinent codes. Code knowledge and design experience by itself is insufficient. Novice special inspectors coming from other industries and occupations will want to look for opportunities to gain the field experience needed as they study for certification exams. Examples of opportunities may include working as a lab or field-testing technician.

(continued on next page)

INTERNATIONAL CODE COUNCIL

The International Code Council attests that the individual named on this certificate has satisfactorily demonstrated knowledge as required by the International Code Council by successfully completing the prescribed written examination based on codes and standards then in effect, and is hereby issued this certification as:

REINFORCED CONCRETE SPECIAL INSPECTOR

John Doe



**INTERNATIONAL
CODE COUNCIL®**



This certificate is the property of ICC and must be returned to ICC in the event of suspension or revocation of the certificate.

13-07600

Certification is one method to show code knowledge. Evidence of field experience must also be provided for approval.