

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of the Natural Stone Institute accreditation program?

To provide excellence in the natural stone industry and recognize companies demonstrating compliance with quality standards, so that the public values, has access to, and benefits from consistent, competent, and safe fabrication, installation and maintenance of natural stone.

2. When and how did the concept of an accreditation program begin?

The concept of natural stone industry accreditation was first addressed in a 2004 Marble Institute of America survey. The response was overwhelmingly positive, and a large majority of respondents said they favored industry standards for competency and credentialing, and felt that there would be advantages for companies that became accredited.

3. What are Natural Stone Institute's goals in creating an accreditation program in the natural stone industry?

- To increase/maintain the competency of the industry, raising the standards and creating a greater awareness of safety. At the same time, to establish accreditation standards that ensure the continued competency of the natural stone industry and recognize companies that achieve them.
- To increase the consistency of practice by promoting consistent quality specifications, workmanship, and the current version of the *Dimension Stone Design Manual* as the natural stone industry standards.
- In broad terms, to protect the consumer by providing access to companies that provide a reliable quality of fabrication, installation, and sale of natural stone. Natural Stone Institute would serve as a clearinghouse for accredited stone companies.
- To enhance the industry's commitment to the beauty, durability, and value of natural stone.

4. *What was the process that Natural Stone Institute went through to establish the accreditation program?*

The first thing Natural Stone Institute did was establish an Accreditation Task Force. Additional data was then collected from fabricators and installers, kitchen and bath dealers, and architects at three industry conferences in the spring of 2005. Then, over a 2-year period, several meetings were held to formulate the program. A final round of industry surveys were collected in 2006. Natural Stone Institute also employed a professional consultant to ensure that the program was developed based on best practices.

5. *Do all members of Natural Stone Institute have to be accredited?*

No, the accreditation program is fully voluntary.

6. *Do you have to be a member of Natural Stone Institute to apply for accreditation?*

No, this is an industry-wide program.

7. *What types of companies are eligible to apply for accreditation?*

The first phase of the program will focus on two types of companies:

- Natural Stone Fabricators serving either the residential or commercial market.
- Natural Stone Commercial A Contractors (heavy commercial) serving the commercial market.
- Natural Stone Commercial B Contractors (light commercial) serving the commercial market.

8. *What is the difference between Commercial A and Commercial B accreditation?*

- Commercial A consists of companies that deal with non-prescriptive, or “engineered,” mechanically anchored stone veneer designed and installed to accommodate imposed loads as designated by applicable codes and/or specifications.
- Commercial B consists of companies that deal primarily with prescriptive, or “non-engineered,” mechanically anchored and adhered stone veneer installed per applicable local codes or governing bodies.

9. *What types of buildings do Commercial A companies and Commercial B companies usually work on?*

- Commercial A companies are firms that handle large-scale commercial stone installations such as high rise interior/exterior wall cladding, museums, or hotel exteriors.
- Commercial B companies are firms that handle smaller scale commercial stone installations such as hotel lobbies, bank lobbies, and low-rise interior/exterior cladding.

10. Will other areas of the natural stone industry be included in the accreditation process?

The accreditation task force recognizes that once these three programs are launched and have established a successful track record, the program model could be used to create similar programs for other facets of the industry.

11. What are the standards that companies applying for accreditation must adhere to?

- Companies are established business entities with the fabrication and/or installation of natural stone as a primary business function.
- Companies demonstrate sound business and trade performance.
- Companies operate ethically and in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.
- Companies ensure safe, quality fabrication and installation of their products and services.
- Companies have financial resources sufficient to conduct their stated business in a safe and effective manner.
- Companies have competent human resources to conduct stated business in a safe and effective manner.
- Companies accurately represent the expertise, experience, credentials, and services of their company and their employees to the public.
- Companies maintain sufficient physical facilities, equipment, and materials to achieve safe and effective operation of their stated business.
- Companies demonstrate sound business and trade practices, including written contracts and comprehensive insurance policies.
- Companies honor agreed-upon warranties and educate consumers with ongoing maintenance requirements.

Application Process/Fees

12. What is the process for a company wishing to get accredited?

- Attend an accreditation information session at an industry trade show or call Natural Stone Institute to gather information
- Request an application
- Complete the written application and provide supporting documentation
- The company's Qualifying Agent must take and pass the accreditation exam
- Host a site visit to assure compliance with accreditation standards
- Comply with ongoing accreditation maintenance requirements

13. How long does the accreditation process take?

If all documents are submitted to Natural Stone Institute in a timely manner, accreditation should be able to be achieved within 6-9 months of requesting an application.

14. Is there a time limit associated with returning an application, taking the exam, and setting up a site visit?

Yes, from the date that a company requests an application, they have one year to return the completed application. The Qualifying Agent will have one year from the date that the application is approved to pass the exam. The company will have one additional year from the date that the exam is passed to complete the site visit.

15. What fees are associated with the accreditation process?

At-A-Glance*

CATEGORY	Application Fee	Application Submission Fee	Site Visit**	QA Exam Fee
NATURAL STONE INSTITUTE MEMBERS				
Natural Stone Fabricator	\$ 250.00	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 750.00	\$ 250.00
Commerical A Contractor	\$ 250.00	\$ 2,250.00	\$ 750.00	\$ 250.00
Commercial B Contractor	\$ 250.00	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 750.00	\$ 250.00
ISFA & NSC MEMBERS				
Natural Stone Fabricator	\$ 250.00	\$ 1,750.00	\$ 750.00	\$ 250.00
Commerical A Contractor	\$ 250.00	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 750.00	\$ 250.00
Commercial B Contractor	\$ 250.00	\$ 1,750.00	\$ 750.00	\$ 250.00
NON-INSTITUTE, NON-ISFA, NON-NSC MEMBERS				
Natural Stone Fabricator	\$ 500.00	\$ 1,900.00	\$ 750.00	\$ 350.00
Commerical A Contractor	\$ 500.00	\$ 2,750.00	\$ 750.00	\$ 350.00
Commercial B Contractor	\$ 500.00	\$ 1,900.00	\$ 750.00	\$ 350.00

* See page 29 for additional information and explanation

** Site visit is \$750, plus inspector's travel, lodging, and meals.

16. Are site visit costs included in the \$1750 for Fabricator/Commercial B (\$2400 for non-Institute members) and \$2500 for Commercial A (\$3250 for non-Institute members) applicants?

No, the entire cost of the site visit will be paid by the applicant. This includes site inspector travel, lodging, and meal costs in addition to a daily fee of \$750.

17. If a Qualifying Agent takes the exam and fails, can he/she take it again?

Yes, a Qualifying Agent can retake the exam. The fee associated with a retake of the exam is \$250 (\$350 for non-Institute, ISFA, or NSC member companies).

18. Are there any discounts available for companies who apply for both types of accreditation or multiple locations at the same time?

For companies applying for accreditation for multiple locations or applying for multiple accreditation designations, the total application fee per location will be reduced by \$250.

19. Once a company is accredited, is it for life?

No. Each year an accredited company's qualifying agent will be required to fill out an annual renewal form indicating any and all significant changes that have occurred within the company that would impact accreditation.

There is also a \$250 (\$500 for non-Institute members) yearly renewal fee, which covers the ongoing staffing, development, and promotional marketing costs associated with the Accreditation Program.

In addition to the yearly renewal, there will be a mandatory site visit every five years for Natural Stone Fabricators and every three years for Commercial A & B Commercial Contractors (to be paid for by the accredited company).

20. What happens to the application fee if a company is or is not accepted?

The application fee is non-refundable; however, the fee will be applied toward the total program fee upon approval of the application.

21. What happens after the company submits an application to Natural Stone Institute?

Natural Stone Institute staff will review the application and confirm if the application and/or all support material has been completed in accordance with the program guidelines. Incomplete applications will be sent back to the applicant as incomplete. Applications in question will be sent to a 3-person review committee for clarification. Natural Stone Institute will schedule the qualifying agent written exam with applicants who have successfully completed the application in full.

Qualifying Agent/Exam

22. What exactly is a “Qualifying Agent”?

A Qualifying Agent is the designated company representative responsible for filing and maintaining accreditation records for the applicant company.

23. Can the Qualifying Agent be anyone at my company?

No. Qualifying agents must be the owner/principal and/or a member of the company's senior management team who is responsible for the care and control of the product/facility.

24. What happens if there are critical changes or a Qualifying Agent leaves an accredited company?

The Qualifying Agent is required to notify Natural Stone Institute within 30 business days of critical changes to their business model (name change, location change, transfer of ownership, bankruptcy, Qualifying Agent departure or change, or other situations which would bring the company into nonconformance). The company may be placed on probationary status until these nonconformities are resolved. In the case of Qualifying Agent departure, a new Qualifying Agent must pass the accreditation examination.

25. How many people from my company take the exam?

At least one person from your company must take the exam. The exam administration fee for that one Qualifying Agent is included in the application fee. If you wish to have multiple people take the exam, a \$250 (\$350 for non-Institute, ISFA, or NSC member companies) fee is assessed per additional person. There is no limit to the number of Qualifying Agents your company can have.

26. How will the exam be administered?

The exam will be open book/notes and will be administered online or onsite at an immersion testing site. Attendees can use laptops to reference material onsite.

27. Where will the exam information come from?

The exam will be based upon the following six areas:

- Material Knowledge & Uses
- Installation Knowledge
- Fabrication Knowledge
- Assessment, Restoration, Care & Maintenance Knowledge
- Jobsite & Shop Safety Knowledge
- Administrative / Legal / Contracts Knowledge

Refer to the recommended reading list on page 38.

28. Why is there such a wide array of information covered on the exam?

A Qualifying Agent is responsible for knowing how and where to find the answers related to these important natural stone industry subjects.

Site Visit

29. After our Qualifying Agent passes the exam, is our company fully accredited?

No. After passing the exam, a site visit will be scheduled with the applicant. During the site visit, Natural Stone Institute will conduct a review of the applicant's facility, as well as completed installations in the area. This review will also verify a number of the details that were attested to on the application.

30. Who is responsible for the costs associated with the site visit?

All travel expenses for the site visit will be invoiced to the applicant.

31. Will I be informed ahead of time who will be performing the site inspection?

Yes, the company will know who is performing the site inspection ahead of time and will be able to request an alternate site inspector if a conflict of interest is suspected.

32. What should I have available for the site inspection?

- Current copy of *Dimension Stone Design Manual* (currently version 8.0)
- Written safety policy documents (including training staff on safe slab handling procedures)
- Written drug testing policy
- Evidence that a quality control process is in place (templating, layout/cutting, fabricating, packing, transportation, installation)–Residential applicants only
- HAZMAT/SDS Sheets/OSHA 300 & 301 logs (or workers compensation boards of Canada applicable injury reporting logs)
- Original OSHA letter/certificate (or workers compensation boards of Canada certificate)
- Fork Lift Training Program documents
- Overhead Crane certification documents
- New staff orientation/training documents
- Employee handbook
- Evidence of apprenticeship or skill or trade development program
- Evidence of job control and work order system
- Evidence of a complaint resolution process
- Evidence of Better Business Bureau complaints resolution (if BBB has complaints on file)
- Examples of customer warranty agreements
- Examples of customer care and maintenance instructions
- (Commercial A Only) Evidence that the company designed project specific stone hoisting and lifting systems (e.g. stone monorail hoisting systems, engineered scaffold, or other custom rigging devices). This includes subcontractor designs.

Appeals

33. If my company is not accepted into the Accreditation Program, can I appeal the decision?

Yes, there will be an appeals process.

34. What is the appeals process?

A company must submit a written request of appeal to the Appeals Commission Chair within 30 days of receipt of the notice that their application for accreditation has been denied. Upon receipt of written request for appeal, Natural Stone Institute staff will send an acknowledgement letter to the appellate company. Appeals will be limited to a review of the written record and will not involve a hearing. The Appeals Committee will review the written record and render a final written decision within 60 days of receiving the appeal.

General Questions

35. How will I find out if my company has been accredited?

A written report will be issued to the company's Qualifying Agent with the following status: pending (requires company to supply additional information); accreditation denied; or accreditation granted.

36. Is there a time frame from the beginning to the end of the accreditation process that my company has to complete the accreditation process?

The applicant will have a maximum of 3 years (depending upon when various stages of accreditation are completed) to complete the process from the date the application is requested.

37. What is the difference between a certification program and an accreditation program?

A certification program refers to the formal recognition of an individual person, while an accreditation program refers to the formal recognition of a company.

38. Where does the Accreditation Program fit into Natural Stone Institute's Strategic Plan?

The Accreditation Program is classified as a High Priority.

39. Who will have access to information submitted during the accreditation application process?

All parties that are privy to information submitted during the accreditation application process will have signed a legally binding confidentiality agreement.

40. Will accredited companies have use of an "Natural Stone Institute Accredited Company" logo?

Yes, accredited companies will have use of a special "Natural Stone Institute Accredited" logo for business cards, stationary, website, etc.

41. What types of changes in an accredited company's business model could jeopardize their accredited status?

In order to maintain its accreditation status, the Qualifying Agent of an accredited company must notify Natural Stone Institute in writing at least thirty (30) business days prior to the adoption of any material change to its business model (name change, transfer of any amount of ownership interest or control in the company, bankruptcy, receivership, sale of all or substantially all of the company's assets, Qualifying Agent departure or change, or any other changes which might materially impact the company's operations and/or its accreditation status). In the case of a qualifying agent departure, a new qualifying agent must be appointed and must pass the accreditation examination. If the company doesn't provide timely notice or allow Natural Stone Institute to investigate proposed changes, the company may be placed on probationary status until the issues are resolved to Natural Stone Institute's satisfaction.
