

5 Essential Steps Towards Certification

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Abstract

While there are many steps to certification, some missteps are more common than others. This paper attempts to name and describe some of the more common errors associated with hazardous locations certifications.

Put Certification First.

In the “traditional” design model, companies design first and certify last, meaning certification errors are discovered late in the process, and much closer to deadlines. A much better approach is to incorporate certification requirements into your plans from day one.

Ignoring the fact that your product requires certifications is unwise. There are faster ways to make sure you don’t get certification, but there are few more certain. Designing for certification up front may be difficult, but it is usually far easier than converting an existing design.

Know Your Requirements.

There are many questions that should be answered up front because they can make or break your project. For example:

- What certifications are required? Certification is often a legal obligation, so knowing the answer to this question is essential.
- What are your marketing requirements? Marketing requirements often go over and above the minimum requirements in order to be competitive. Some markets expect or require specific agency marks, and having a different mark may become a point of contention for your sales force to overcome later.

- Are there additional tests, such as performance testing, that apply to your product? Sometimes these requirements are mandatory, while others are nominally optional but often demanded owing to competitive pressures.
- Are you planning to certify internationally? If yes, you should know up front what countries and regions you are planning to enter and the necessary certification requirements. In addition, you should have a plan as to timing – are you planning to certify all at once, or in stages?

Of course, some of these may be difficult, especially as the requirements always seem to be a bit of a moving target. Regardless, if you don't aim carefully, you'll never have a chance of hitting the target.

Understand The Standards.

There is no doubt that certification standards are among the most opaque, obscure and basically user-unfriendly documents in existence. They also tend to be pretty boring.

Nevertheless, understanding the technical requirements laid out in the standards is absolutely essential. It's really very simple: if you don't fulfill the requirements, you don't have a product to sell. It's that important.

Oddly, few people would feel comfortable designing a product without a good understanding of the user requirements, but many are quite happy to go ahead with only a vague understanding of the certification requirements. There are many reasons for this, but ignoring the standards is a sure recipe for disaster.

Choose An Agency Early.

There are many advantages to choosing an agency partner early in the process. Good agency management can help provide information, avoid problems, and save time and money. Different agencies have different strengths and weaknesses, and cost and schedule can vary enormously, so it is usually worthwhile to shop around.

As with the technical requirements themselves, picking an agency can also be something of a moving target – especially in recent years. This makes it even more critical to work as hard as you can with – and on – your agency.

Seek Expert Guidance.

It is often more cost-effective to get expert help rather than go it alone. Certification standards can be complex, confusing, and full of pitfalls. Your agency partner is one source of information, but they are limited in what they can and cannot do for you.

If you do not have in-house expertise in the development and certifications you require, seeking outside help can help avoid long delays and costly errors. The time and money saved makes it worthwhile to take advantage of expert guidance whenever possible.



About Spark Institute

Spark Institute is a full-service consultancy that specializes in intrinsically safe and hazardous locations design services. Our experience covers North American, ATEX, and IEC requirements.

Design Consulting

Know what you want, but don't know how? Put our years of experience to work for you. We can design hazardous locations products to your specifications.

Design Evaluation

Have an existing product, design, or concept? Spark Institute can help evaluate your design to the relevant standards to help ensure compliance. Take advantage of our experience to reduce your risks before making costly mistakes.

Training Services

Good designers aren't born - they're trained. Our training courses will drastically shorten the learning curve for both new and experienced designers. Courses can be tailored to your product lines on request.

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