

Steels ain't just steels, must be up to scratch

Third party accreditation scheme extended to structural sections

The Australasian Standards Certification and Verification of Reinforcing, Prestressing and Structural Steels Compliance (ACRS) authority has extended its coverage to include structural steels due to market need to ensure compliance to standards.

This coincides with the review of Australian standards AS/NZS 1163 and AS/NZS 3679 parts 1 and 2 for hollow sections and open sections to tighten marking and certification requirements.

The latest move is reinforced by quality concerns coming from organisations such as Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads (Qld TMR) and the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) in NSW around structural steelwork.

"It is widely recognised in Australia that the extent of structural steel material, bolts and fabrication quality problems have increased significantly in recent years," a recent structural steel review report from Qld TMR stated. "It is noted that in this time period there has also been a change in sourcing from overseas suppliers."

Consult Australia urges that "without assurance that the steel we are inspecting complies with the relevant Australian Standards our certificates are meaningless and we are exposed to potential structural failures, court action and financial ruin"

"Building Certifiers rely on products and systems doing what they are certified to do and the best way to ensure this happens is with an independent third party," the AIBS maintains.

This is a mechanism for Australian builders and specifiers to catch up on quality assurance relating to structural steel sections following well documented failures and non-compliance around imported steels.

ACRS Executive Director, **Philip Sanders** suggested that sound product checks are really the last lines of defence against low quality or sections not being fit-for-purpose.

He explained that an independent verification-based product certification scheme is essential to ensure Australia and New Zealand do not become dumping grounds for steel increasingly rejected by the rest of the world.



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This is exactly what happened with structural steel high-tensile bolts once Australia ceased making them due to commercial pressures and industry is now having to 'back fit' certification schemes.

The issue has been on the ASI's radar for some time from reports of faulty imported steels regularly coming from members and through its representation on standards committees.

The ASI Chief Executive, **Don McDonald** was recently appointed to the Board of ACRS.

Australian and overseas steel manufacturers have been invited to participate in this third party scheme.

OneSteel is an inaugural member and has accreditation for its structural sections, currently holding ACRS certification for hot

rolled structural products from its Whyalla mill and for merchant bar from its Sydney steel mill and Laverton in Victoria. And assessments are underway for certification of OneSteel's tubular products and several overseas manufacturers have expressed interest, ACRS advises.

ACRS is well placed to conduct impartial assessments as the body has no specific commercial affiliations, operates as a not-for-profit organisation and under the auspices of an independent Board of Directors, and is structurally separate from the body that publishes the standards.

ACRS is an industry specialist assessing only to AS/NZ steel standards and specifications and is open to all manufacturers.

There are very real benefits for engaging third party assessment as the alternative means reviewing all test results for the actual materials supplied to site, not just accepting the supplier laboratory's test reports at face value, lumbering builders and engineers with a lot of extra chasing around to validate.

Philip Sanders was a plenary presenter at the Australian Steel Convention 2011 in Canberra.