

Certification Fraud: A Serious Problem for Everyone

Failing to check an individual's credentials can have disastrous and costly consequences

BY PETER HOWE

The American Welding Society does not treat fraud and violations to the Code of Ethics for its certified inspectors lightly. Not only are the Society's integrity and the integrity of its programs at stake, but the effect that fraud and ethics violations can have on companies and their products is equally damaging. Therefore, employers should be especially vigilant.

Following is an example of what can happen when someone uses fraudulent credentials and the company is not diligent about verifying those credentials. Although this case took place in Australia, incidents such as this also occur in the United States and other countries. The name of the individual alleged in this fraud is omitted (replaced with an X) because he is not an AWS credential holder and did not pass himself off as such.

The following is quoted from an e-mail dated September 27, 2008, by Andrew Sales, QA and welding coordinator, BP, Kwinana, Western Australia.

"I'd like to alert ALL of the importance of reference checking and certificate/qualification checking when looking to employ welding inspectors.

"The subject person is XXXXXXXX and claims to have Trade Cert in Fabrication, Cert 10, API Inspectors ticket, and eight years' experience in the industry as an inspector. Verification of these certificates was made and no record of them existed.

"Apprenticeships WA verified that no certification exists and is now in the hands of management and is being treated as fraud.

"API inspectors' database verified no qualification under that name exists. In fact, the false document provided an incorrect title and code/standard number.

"We have just experienced employing the above-mentioned person as a qualified welding inspector, only to find later (through suspicion and lack of knowledge) that certificates and inspection qualification were false. Upon further investigation of the submitted résumé, we phoned past employers and found the following:

"(Curriculum vitae) quotes AUSCLAD 10 years as a welder. Reference check with HR (human resources) confirmed he was never employed with them and only made an enquiry for work as a (trades assistant)/rigger on 10/11/2006.

"(Curriculum vitae) quotes CB&I 13 months as a welder/welding inspector LNG Train 4 Karratha. CB&I HR confirmed he was employed as a trades assistant the entire 13 months.

"(Curriculum vitae) quotes Total Corrosion Control. He was employed as a trades assistant between 2004 and 2006.

"(Curriculum vitae) quotes TWI inspector's certificate mentioned on résumé. NO certificate exists.

"As a consequence of our subcontractor's failure to check past experience and qualifications of XXXXXXXX, we have now found that all welding traceability, weld maps, and as-built drawings have NOT been done, which has now put us in a very awkward position. We are maybe looking at an extra two weeks' work to catch up while our shutdown starts in just under a week. To help those looking to employ inspectors, please be diligent in your assessment of curriculum vitae and qualifications. The following points may help:

- ◆ "Phoning references. Phone the actual company (human resources department), as some references provided may be 'mates.'
- ◆ "Checking certificates and qualifications. Contact the welding institutes as they have databases of ALL personnel qualified. Most are accessible online.
"The main certifying organizations are as follows:
- ◆ "CSWIP UK (Certification Scheme for Welding Inspection Personnel), www.twi.co.uk
- ◆ "WTIA (Welding Technology Institute of Australia) www.wtia.com.au and AICIP (Australian Institute for Certification of Inspection Personnel), www.aicip.org.au
- ◆ "CBIP (Certification Board for Inspection Personnel), www.cbip.org.nz
- ◆ "AWS CWI (American Welding Society Certified Welding Inspector), www.aws.org
- ◆ "IWI (International Welding Institute), www.iw-iis.org
"Please remember, if someone has attended a course and either failed or did not sit the exam, they are NOT qualified.
"This example is very serious as fraud has been committed and should not be treated lightly by potential employers.
"Please pass on to others you know as we need to protect those **qualified inspectors** in the industry who have spent a lot of money and time to get where they are today."

Checking CWI Credentials

Failing to properly verify an individual's credential can cost you and your company a lot of money and cause major headaches and potential safety risks if inspections are not done by genuinely certified individuals. It is easy to verify the credential of an AWS Certified Welding Inspector by accessing the QuickCheck site at www.aws.org/w/a/certification/search.html

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and entering the certification number.

The American Welding Society receives many reports from diligent individuals, like Mr. Sales, who are genuinely concerned about the integrity of their profession and who want to do the right thing. It would be impossible, of course, for AWS to independently audit the credentials of every person who claims to hold an AWS certification. We can only act when circumstances are brought to our attention, and therefore AWS truly appreciates individuals like Mr. Sales. AWS, through its Subcommittee on the Code of Ethics follows leads that are submitted, investigates the cases, and has legal counsel follow up.

Recent Cases

Some of the cases AWS has investigated and acted on recently are noted in the following paragraphs. One case reported to AWS on September 2, 2008, is one in which a company had a forged stamp and CWI number made up so it could pass its work off as inspected by a CWI. The forged stamp's imprint (shown in Fig. 1) was clearly visible on a copy of an "official" Welder Qualification Test Record for an individual who worked for this company. The stamp is clearly forged because AWS SCWI and CWI welding inspectors are not certified to QC2; they are certified to AWS QC1. Furthermore, the certification number (251196780) is bogus because

- ◆ All AWS certification numbers are eight digits (this one has nine)
- ◆ All AWS certification numbers begin with the year and month certified; e.g., someone who tested for CWI and passed at the CWI level in October 2008 would have a number 0811XXXX1 or 0811XXXX3 (the certification commences on the first day of the month following the exam date); if only CAWI level was achieved, the number would be 0811XXXX2 or 0811XXXX4; if the SCWI test was taken and passed, the number would be 0811XXXX8.

The stamp, which is shown in Fig. 2, was turned in to AWS. The name has been covered because this case is still open.

Another recent case involved the manufacture of a "doctored" wallet card, shown in Fig. 3. This individual was originally a CWI with the number 95040371. Noted in the next paragraph is an e-mail message from Peter Howe sent August 28, 2007, to the complainant. Once again, the name of the individual has been covered because this case is ongoing.

"As I informed you this morning during our telephone conversation, I have reviewed the documentation you mailed us regarding Mr. XYZ and his certification status. The documentation of the CWI card dated "Renew by April 2007" appears to be a forgery. Our records show that Mr. XYZ took the required nine-year recertification test in 2004 and failed to meet the CWI passing requirement of 72% minimum, making him a CAWI. A CAWI number (04040564) and card was issued in April 2004.

"There is no record in his files that he ever contacted AWS to have his exam rescored based on two challenged questions. It appears that Mr. XYZ took his CWI card issued in 2001 with his original CWI number of 95040371 and altered it with a new date (April 2007). This allegation is evident because the 2001 card and 2004 card both have the same signatures of the president of AWS and the chair of the Certification Committee. In 2001, the president of AWS was L. William Myers and the chair of the Certification Committee was James E. Greer. However, in 2004, the AWS president was Thomas M. Mustaleski, and the chair of the Certification Committee was Reed Nielsen. Their signatures are not present on the 2004 card (valid to April 2007) you sent a copy of.

"Therefore, it appears that the 2004 card had been 'doctored' with a forged date. That means that Mr. XYZ was a CAWI, not a CWI, during the past three years since April 2004."

The three cases outlined in this article clearly indicate that

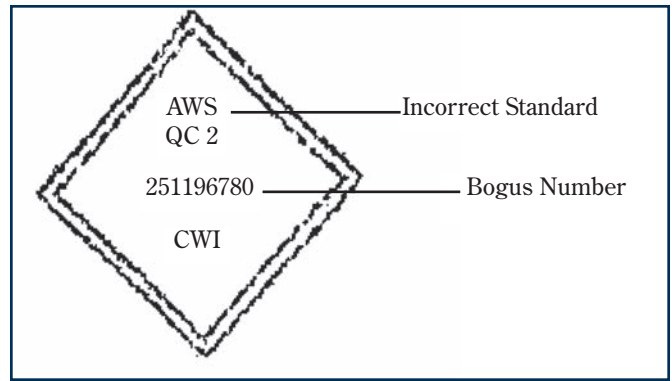


Fig. 1 — Imprint from Welding Qualification Test Record.



Fig. 2 — The fake stamp and imprint.



Fig. 3 — Forged wallet card.

all of us must be diligent in verifying an individual's credentials with the proper organization or government agency to make sure they are genuine and current. Failing to do so can have disastrous and costly consequences. Furthermore, allowing these frauds to operate unchecked besmirches legitimate credential holders and undermines the credibility of the issuing entity.❖