Keeping them honest: SAI Global’s ‘five ticks’ for fall prevention gear
Workplace Safety and Access products achieve compliance to AS 1657

“The salesman will tell you the product complies. Most manufacturers think their products comply but, in my experience, few actually do,” says one of Australia’s most senior auditors, Ehab Melek.

Mr Melek, who audits building and infrastructure products on behalf of standards organisation SAI Global, makes the case for the independent certification of compliance with recognised quality and safety standards with a pointed question: “If your life depended on a piece of equipment, would you be happy to rely on the salesman’s spiel or would you want it checked out?”

While compliance may be mandated for some safety equipment, often, independent verification of that compliance is not.

In some industries, competition has made independent third party certification the norm. The familiar ‘five ticks’ StandardsMark™ issued by SAI Global is voluntary but universally sought for Australian glass, for example.

On the other hand, only one Australian company – Workplace Access & Safety – has achieved SAI Global certification for the design, manufacture and installation of fall prevention equipment.

Workplace Access & Safety’s managing director, Carl Sachs, says he applied for certification for compliance with AS 1657, fixed platforms, walkways, stairways and ladders to address a regulatory blind-spot.

“Our equipment stops people from falling off roofs,” he says. “The law recognises that this is critical equipment and is very clear that workplaces must ensure it meets the Australian Standard®. Just how people can tell whether what they’re buying really does comply, however, is anything but clear.”

“It’s an untenable position for everyone who cares about safety or their liability,” says Mr. Sachs. “Our equipment stops people from falling off roofs,” he says. “We’ve streamlined some processes and reduced rework and unnecessary returns to site.”

Carl has also implemented and certified Management Systems based on the Standards to help ensure workplace quality and health and safety within his own organisation. At the same time, Mr. Sachs says it was important to maintain Workplace Access & Safety’s competitiveness and was pleasantly surprised to find certification more than paid for itself.

“Some of the auditors’ suggestions actually saved us money,” he says. “We’ve streamlined some processes and reduced rework and unnecessary returns to site.”

“SAI Global’s accreditation scheme has enabled us to be even more price competitive by getting leaner and meaner than ever.”

“Workplace Access & Safety had no problem with compliance, they pursued independent certification to differentiate themselves from competitors who are not able to prove compliance and inspire public confidence.”

Adding to the already stringent certification process, the reports prepared by Mr. Melek and the building certifier were reviewed by another SAI Global auditor removed from the process before certification could be approved.

“The five ticks StandardsMark™ carries a lot of weight with corporate Australia, with research showing 82% of people are aware of it,” says Melek. “A product carrying the “five ticks” has a competitive advantage because it has credibility.”

That credibility stems from a rigorous audit process, which Mr. Melek explains is designed to weed out those who pay lip-service to compliance. SAI Global auditors begin with a desktop investigation of an applicant’s documented procedures and then spend days on-site to conduct a thorough reality-check.

“You can buy compliance documentation in a box but templates are not enough,” says Melek, “you need to have a system that’s actually working.”

“I’ll ask who is responsible for a procedure and its documentation, then follow through by taking a look at the dates, how often it’s been reviewed and whether it’s been refined over time.”

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When something does go wrong, you’re set up to capture non-conformity (and learn from it) before it reaches the customer. It all translates into customer satisfaction.

“It’s not hard to tell whether this is a genuine, living and breathing system or something that just sits on the shelf.”

In the case of Workplace Access & Safety, Mr. Melek spent a day at the Melbourne manufacturing facility and SAI Global’s building certifier accompanied the company’s tradespeople during installations.

“Workplace Access & Safety was very professional and I left with the impression that this was a market leader because they’re just good at what they do,” Melek says. “That’s the beauty of a strong and workable system – you draw on the collective knowledge of your people to develop the optimum way of doing something and then systematise it so that you keep on doing it the right way.”

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