
ASA Pool Shotcrete Contractor's Qualification Program

By Ryan Oakes & Marcus von der Hofen

It's been a wild few years in the pool industry with growth in some areas of the industry estimated to be up over 500%, and it's not all good unfortunately. The COVID Pandemic brought pool buyers out by the hundreds of thousands, and new pool builders were popping up like baby rabbits in the Spring. The pre-pandemic market had a poor balance of shotcrete contractors to pool builders with there being slightly more demand for shotcrete contractors than supply. That is probably due to the highly specialized nature of the shotcrete process, the cost of entry into the market, and the overall gritty nature of being a shotcreter. Once the demand swung high enough, however, the scales tipped and those barriers of entry to the market fell down.

School teachers became pool contractors and sales people became shotcreters. Everyone wanted in on the wave of action. Established shotcrete companies already had a real struggle finding labor in such a demanding market, and the new demand drove wages up dramatically within the industry. But shotcreters can't just appear overnight. It takes years of specialized training to become good at the process. It also takes a great deal of knowledge in the process to be a successful contractor that specializes in shotcrete. Established shotcrete contractors had to either grow or lose market share to inexperienced shotcrete contractors that didn't know how to price their work, or worse, perform the work in a quality way. So many variables were popping up that the pool industry fell into a chaotic spin. Cement shortages and reduced allocations from building industry growth tempered the problem a touch as did manufacturing shortages across the industry. Swimming pool pumps and filters had lead times of over one year in some cases.

Somehow the pressure remained, and new shotcrete contractors were showing up every day. I personally fielded weekly calls from individuals wanting to start their own shotcrete company—mostly pool contractors who were frustrated that their shotcrete contractor couldn't keep up with their growth.

So why tell this story? It is important to understand because it has happened before. The results of rapid construction growth are not isolated to the pool industry, and they aren't new. For decades, construction growth has ebbed and flowed with the economy in general, and labor,

accordingly, has had to rise to the occasion each time or be let go to find more stable work. Booms in the economy and advances in technology have spurred the use of shotcrete placement in the past and the misuse of the process as well.

To that end, 25 years ago, a group of highly skilled shotcrete industry leaders, comprised of contractors, university researchers, engineers, and manufacturing companies joined together to create the American Shotcrete Association (ASA). Shortly thereafter, the ASA and the American Concrete Institute (ACI) jointly developed the Certified Nozzleman program for Shotcrete Nozzlemen. The effort became a valuable resource for an industry that needed education, training, and certification so that owners and specifiers could feel comfortable with the benefits of the shotcrete process, which are numerous when held against form-and-pour concrete construction. Over the past 25 years, ASA and ACI have taught and certified thousands of nozzlemen (soon that be called shotcreters in ACI and ASA documents)!

Unfortunately, most of the certified shotcreters are busy shooting tunnels, bridges, slope support, marine structures, etc. There are too few ACI-Certified Nozzlemen in the swimming pool industry today.

Stepping back just a moment – over the last decade, members of ASA realized that we also needed a qualification for the shotcrete contractor, not just a nozzleman certification. After all, it is the shotcrete contractor that is hired to do the work, not typically the nozzleman. There was, and still is, a problem wherein a contractor, that is not familiar with the nuances of the shotcrete process, decides to buy or rent a pump, hire a nozzleman from someone else, and call themselves a shotcrete contractor. This practice often results in poor quality work. It takes a complete, experienced shotcrete team from owner, project manager, maintenance, equipment operators, finishers as well as a nozzleman for quality shotcrete placement.

The ASA Contractor Qualification Committee was created to help provide quality assurance to prospective specifiers and owners that the shotcrete contractor they were hiring was a peer-reviewed and industry-vetted contractor that had not only the technical credentials but also the experience, personnel, equipment, and financial stability to perform the work they were being hired for.

While in its early stages, this qualification program stands to provide credibility for shotcrete contractors around the world just as the ACI-Certified Nozzleman Program has done for nozzlemen.

The ASA Qualified Contractor (CQ) program, however, is geared very much toward commercial shotcrete uses and not so much toward swimming pool construction using shotcrete placement. To that end, the ASA Pool and Recreation Committee has worked closely with the Qualified Contractor Committee to create a Pool Shotcrete Qualified Contractor Program.

This program will be very similar to the existing CQ program but tailored to the pool industry. We are leveraging presentations we already use, such as Quality Shotcrete—Know It When you See It, and modifying everything from the contractor presentation to the required application and exams to be very swimming pool specific.

This program will provide pool builders, owners, and specifiers the confidence that the pool shotcrete contractor they hire is not a fly-by-night contractor; rather, they are industry-vetted, peer-reviewed, and financially stable; additionally, they will employ certified nozzlemen for placement and will have received education in the subject matter as well as passed a rigorous test. Past project success will be reviewed over the course of the past 3 years to ensure that longevity is a component of their existence.

This is not an easy program to enter, but neither is the shotcrete business as a whole. Owners spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on their backyard improvements with a swimming pool installation, and the shotcreted pool shell is the backbone of that process. It is essential to the success of the pool construction that a qualified shotcrete contractor is utilized for this process, and now we have a program to provide that assurance to the client. This program will launch in the Spring of 2024 with several members of the community and industry leaders already in line to apply for the program.

This program will be a tool for pool contractors as well, so they may leverage the quality of an industry-vetted shotcrete contractor to promote the quality of their overall pool construction.

Like the QC Program, the Pool Shotcrete Qualified Contractor Program will take time to become what the ACI-Certified Nozzleman Program has become, but industry leaders in pool education, such as Watershape University, have already expressed support for the program and will aid in its launch. We are excited to see this program begin, and we look forward to it ensuring quality shotcrete placement around the world.

For more information on the program, including how to apply for the program, please don't hesitate to contact ASA at www.shotcrete.org.



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