

Designated vs. Authorized vs. Competent vs. Qualified Persons

by Tony Alotto

We get a lot of calls, even from outreach trainers, wanting to know what it takes to become a Designated or Authorized or Competent or Qualified Person from an OSHA perspective. Let's take a look at each of these terms.

"Designated" and "Authorized" essentially mean the same thing. From the Construction Standard, "Designated person" means "authorized person" as defined in paragraph (d) of this section." (1926.32(i)). OK, so let's look at paragraph (d) which reads: "Authorized person" means a person approved or assigned by the employer to perform a specific type of duty or duties or to be at a specific location or locations at the jobsite." (1926.32(d))

That's pretty straightforward. It is up to the employer to determine who is Authorized (or Designated) to perform specific tasks or be in specific areas. The onus is on the employer to ensure that those employees have the knowledge, skills, personal protective equipment, etc. to perform work in that area safely.

The term "Competent" takes on a little higher authority. OSHA uses the term "Competent Person" in many of the 29 CFR standards and other documents.

It is generally defined as:

"Competent person" means one who is capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards in the surroundings or working conditions which are unsanitary, hazardous, or dangerous to employees, and who has authorization to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate them." (1926.32(f)) It is specifically defined in selected standards as well, by referencing the competence involved. For example: "Competent person" means a person who is capable of identifying hazardous or dangerous conditions in the personal fall arrest system or any component thereof, as well as in their application and use with related equipment." (1910.66 Appendix C)

So, if we examine this definition, a Competent Person must be able to meet two criteria:

1. Capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards in the surroundings or working conditions which are unsanitary, hazardous or dangerous to employees specific to the equipment in use, and
2. Has authorization to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate them.

Meeting the first part of the definition has a lot to do with the complexity of the job task involved, the job site itself and the equipment in use. This is met with a combination of appropriate training and experience in performing the task(s) using the tools and equipment involved in the conditions of the job site. Only the employer can judge whether the employee has met the training and experience requirements as well as having the capability of identifying existing and predictable hazards. Second, the employer is the only one who provides "authority" to an employee.

So, how does one become a competent person? The designation comes from the employer. The employer must weigh an employee's training, experience, and



capability and provide the required authority before an employee is considered to be "Competent" from an OSHA perspective.

What about a "Qualified Person"? OSHA is stricter when it comes to "Qualified."

A typical definition is:

"Qualified" means one who, by possession of a recognized degree, certificate, or professional standing, or who by extensive knowledge, training, and experience, has successfully demonstrated his ability to solve or resolve problems relating to the subject matter, the work, or the project." (1926.32(m)).

Again, OSHA may be more specific in a specific standard, for example in Subpart S – Electrical "Qualified Person" is defined as:

"One who has received training in and has demonstrated skills and knowledge in the construction and operation of electric equipment and installations and the hazards involved."

So, it appears to become "Qualified" you must have:

1. Received training specific to the equipment involved (e.g., Engineers, Electricians)
2. Demonstrated skills and knowledge to solve or resolve problems specific to the subject or work.

This is the highest hurdle anyone must leap when working on a jobsite and it is generally reserved for those positions that have the highest potential for injury or death to the worker, other workers, or the general public if things aren't done exactly right.

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NOTE: This article originally published in TEEX Outreach Insider™ 1-14.