

OSHA standards often reference designations like Competent Person and Qualified Person. Training programs may refer to a trained and Authorized User. OSHA says a Designated Person is the same as an Authorized Person. Many organizations require Certified Persons on staff.

But what do all of these titles or designations mean? How do you know if you are allowed to call yourself any of these terms? If you are Certified, does it also mean you are Competent and Qualified?

It's confusing! Take some time to read through this safety topic to gain a better understanding of what it means to be called competent, qualified, authorized, designated, and certified.

COMPETENT

QUALIFIED

AUTHORIZED

CERTIFIED

DESIGNATED

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Important points that apply to all of these terms:

- It is the employer who determines which employees are designated as any of these persons. An individual, a training class, a third-party company, a certificate, or years on the job do not determine an employee's classification, only the employer can make these assignments.
- Once a company has determined what it takes for any employee to become competent, qualified, designated or authorized, and certified, those specific requirements should be documented.
- Employees should be familiar with these terms, know if any apply to them and for which job tasks, and know who else on the team is competent, qualified, authorized, and certified.

OSHA defines a **Competent Person** as:

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.

A competent person needs both knowledge and authority.

With training and experience, a competent person is knowledgeable about applicable standards, can identify workplace or job site hazards that are specific to the area of competency, and they have the authority to correct those hazards.

- Some standards add additional specific requirements for the competent person.



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Competency is demonstrated by a person's knowledge, skills, experience, and training. Knowledge may come from on-the-job training, years of experience on the job, additional training classes, or a higher-level degree.

- A competent person is required for specific work types and work conditions. Often, an OSHA standard will require that a competent person inspect the work area, specific equipment, or job conditions before work begins.

It is the employer's responsibility to designate a competent person on a job site or in a facility.

- You do not need a certificate to show competence unless it is required by your employer.

OSHA defines a **Qualified Person** as:

Someone who, by possession of a recognized degree, certificate, or professional standing, or who by extensive knowledge, training, and experience, has successfully demonstrated their ability to solve or resolve problems relating to the subject matter, the work, or the project.



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It is up to the employer to decide what they consider to be a recognized degree or certificate, or how they define extensive knowledge and training. The employer must also determine what it means for a someone to have the ability to solve or resolve problems.

- A qualified person typically has more extensive training than a competent person.
- It is possible that someone is both the competent person and the qualified person on site.
- The terms competent person or qualified person are not general terms, like a job title. Employees receive this status for specific tasks or duties only. For example, an employee could be “the competent person for excavations” or “the competent person for scaffolding.”
- Other workers should be informed who the competent and qualified persons are within the organization for specific tasks, so they know who to turn to with questions and concerns.
- An employer can revoke an employee’s competent person or qualified person status and duties.

OSHA states that a **Designated Person** means the same thing as an **Authorized Person**, defined as:

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.

It is the employer's responsibility to determine if an employee can be designated to perform a specific task or action or is authorized to use specific equipment.

- The term **Authorized User** is often used to mean the same thing.




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OSHA avoids defining the term **Certified Person**, but the common definition simply means a person who has earned a certification.


- The employer is responsible for clarifying what it means to be a certified person. They must establish the requirements that an employee must meet in order to be called a certified person.
- If an employee has a certificate, or is considered a certified person, it does not automatically mean they are also a competent person, a qualified person, or an authorized or designated person.


EXAMPLES:

 An employee had training on how to wear, care for, and inspect a personal fall protection system that they use on the job and their employer designates them as an authorized user of PFAS.

 In a warehouse, a worker has received training on how to recognize hazards and how to work safely around forklifts. This worker also attends weekly safety meetings on relevant safety topics. Their employer has stated they are a designated person who is authorized to work in the warehouse and on the loading dock.

 After completing training, an employee demonstrated to their employer that they are capable of recognizing hazards and performing inspections of their lifting slings and rigging hardware and they have the authorization to remove questionable or damaged equipment. The employer may recognize them as a competent person on specific lifting and rigging activities.

 For electrical work, a qualified person is someone 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. The employer will decide which employees are qualified to work on specific electrical equipment or supervise others as a qualified person.

 An employer may require heavy equipment operators to receive training and be certified before they are allowed to operate specific equipment or machinery. A crane operator who has received the required certification and maintains their license, as required by the employer, can be designated as a certified person.

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