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Unethical Decisions in NDT

January 2, 2025

Quality and integrity are important features for any industry, but they are especially important in the field of Nondestructive Testing (NDT). For years I have told people about the importance of NDT and how the decisions we make affect people's lives. I often tell students and inspectors; "When we do our jobs right, people live. When we do our jobs wrong, people die." Deciding if a part is acceptable or rejectable is only one aspect of [the importance of this industry](#). Equally important, if not more important, is the ethics behind our decision. This is a very small industry and one's word and integrity are all they have. Once someone is labelled unethical, they will likely have a very hard time finding work in this industry. There is at least one individual in this industry that I will never work with, never qualify, or be associated with the company that employs that individual.

Inspectors must always stay true to themselves and the inspection at hand. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon that inspectors find themselves in a so-called "trap" in that production wants a "good" part back and they want it back now. If production had their way, parts would likely not even be inspected. I have told people that for years; "It is production's job to get the part done, and it is our job to make sure the part was done right." Because of this trap, I have seen some inspectors decide to skip the inspection and simply accept a part, weld, or whatever was supposed to be inspected. I have even had arguments with inspectors for accepting parts because they "felt" that the in-service stresses were very low and the part was built very strong. Therefore, what is the point in even inspecting the part?

It is true that parts are often built to withstand a higher stress than the intended service of the part, but that is not our job as inspectors to determine. As an inspector, we are getting paid to inspect a part regardless of the intended service and design strength of the part. I remember an inspector telling me "Don't bother inspecting those parts. Those parts are always good." What I realized in that moment was that, yeah, these parts are always good, because this inspector has probably never inspected one; scary thought.

Source: <https://www.qualitymag.com/articles/98490-unethical-decisions-in-ndt>

The most egregious ethics violation I have seen in this industry is people accepting parts without even inspecting them. I have also seen documents forged such as classroom training certificates, experience records, certification records, even The American Society for Nondestructive Testing (ASNT) certificates. Years ago, I was asked how to ban an inspector from the industry over the ethics violations that the inspector committed, which ultimately led to the closure of the company. I told the person that I wish there was a process for it. When I served on the Board of Directors for ASNT, [banning inspectors](#) from the industry was a discussion that we had as well.

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[In aerospace](#), it is common for inspectors to use a stamp as opposed to physically signing the paperwork that accompanies the parts. Something I come across often is that the inspector does not understand that the stamp *is* their signature. Inspectors often think “It’s just a stamp,” and they do not realize the importance behind it. They do not realize that everything they stamp, sign, or fill out becomes a legal document and can be called into evidence in a court of law if something ever happens and the company gets sued. Inspectors in this industry are not likely to get sued themselves, but that does not mean that they will not end up on the stand in front of a judge, jury, and grieving family defending what they did.

Another thing that has occurred is somebody using somebody else’s stamp. When people do this, they are not only committing fraud by using somebody else’s stamp, but that they are also committing identity theft because when they stamp the paperwork, they are stamping it as that other person. I do not feel I need to explain the ethics behind that. One manager told me of a time that they noticed that a specific inspector’s stamp was on some paperwork for parts that were currently in-process through the plant. The issue was that the inspector was on vacation at that same time when the stamp was being used. When the manager investigated it, they discovered that the inspector gave their stamp to a trainee (un-certified individual) and told them to stamp the paperwork while the inspector was on vacation.

Ethics violations are not just limited to the inspection of parts, but it could also be to the safety of personnel. In field radiography, using radioactive materials or X-ray machines, the inspectors are using an extremely deadly piece of equipment, and I have seen many instances where radiographers treat it with less care and respect than I feel they should. Being we cannot sense the radiation coming off the equipment, there tends to be a complacency as to how dangerous it really is. Because of this, I have seen and heard of many instances where radiation barriers were not positioned correctly. In such instances, members of the public could have received more exposure to the radiation than they are legally allowed to receive. To me, this is as big of an ethics violation as somebody accepting a part without inspecting it, because at that point, they have potentially put that other person in grave danger. Violating state and/or federal laws can lead to the company losing their radioactive material license, X-ray machine registration, and/or getting fined, as well as land the radiographer in jail.

What it boils down to is that we must always find integrity and ethics in what we do. It seems to me that too often people forget the importance of what we do. Just because an inspector has never heard of one of their parts failing in service, does not mean that it has never happened. On the other hand, some inspectors have seen their parts stressed beyond the limit and the part held. I remember seeing a pipe assembly I inspected in a refinery being lifted incorrectly by one crane instead of two. By the time the crane operator set the pipe down he had a 120-foot tall “U” instead of a straight run. The whole time all I can think of was “At least my weld held.”

When applying to be an ASNT Level III, the applicant must sign and agree to follow a code of ethics. This is a common practice for any organization that issues certifications. The American Welding Society (AWS) has their code of ethics for the certifications they issue and the American Petroleum Institute (API) has their code of conduct.

A lot of societies even have a code of ethics, or code of conduct, for the members of the society and violating that code could lead to that individual losing their membership and the benefits that go with being a member of that society.

Overall, I feel that there is not enough education on the topic of ethics. Due to this, some Aerospace Primes, for example, Rolls Royce, have taken it upon themselves that any company that engages with Rolls Royce must have an ethics policy that every certified individual must sign and agree to. I feel this is an excellent way of enforcing ethics and it is something every inspection company should do with all their employees. This industry is so important, and I am still amazed when people make unethical decisions. Inspectors need to be true to themselves and be true to the inspection. I personally feel that the most important thing in this industry is to remember what we do. "When we do our jobs right, people live. When we do our jobs wrong, people die."

KEYWORDS: [manufacturingmetrologyweld inspection](#)