



# The history and development of VCA

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The description following below is how I experienced the development of what now is known as VCA certification. As I have no files in my possession, I write this from memory. Many facts including dates can, however, be verified from documents that I expect to be in the possession of others.

## Background

I am a chemical engineer by education and have spent most of my working life in the area of Risk and Safety Management. I have been involved in (management) safety systems since the early seventies when I became acquainted with, and was trained in the USA in, what was then called the Total Loss Control System (INA / ISA). That system formed the basis for the International Safety Rating System (ISRS) as it was developed in 1978 (ILCI). After working with pre-ISRS systems during the late seventies, I introduced the ISRS into The Netherlands and Europe during the early eighties and have worked (training, auditing, consulting) with that system for many years.

I became involved in contractor safety issues when I participated in 1983 in a team investigating contractor safety issues of a project of one of the oil majors. At that time, my observation was that the selection of a contractor (with regards to safety) was not really done on proven performance and established safety (management) systems of that contractor. Rather, the contractor was given a manual containing the project safety issues and told to “live by that book”. My assumption then was that contractor personnel could not be expected to work differently from what they were used to just because they were on a specific project – they would do things the way that they were always doing them. From a selection point of view I reasoned that it would be far better to select contractors based on their (verifiable) safety (management) system and efforts and their long-term (historic) performance.

Other than being on the investigation team, I had at that time and for years thereafter no dealings with contractors and the ideas I had in 1983 just remained in the back of my head.

## The first meeting

It was not before 1989 that I got similar questions from two major companies in the chemical and oil industry (DOW / NAM) that motivated me get a number of people around the table to discuss the issue of contractor safety and selection. This led to a meeting at GEP in Bergen op Zoom on December 7, 1989. Apart from myself (then working for my own account as LCC – Loss Control Centre), the meeting was attended by representatives from the following companies:

- Dow (Terneuzen)
- Nerefco (Europoort)
- Dupont (Dordrecht)
- Esso (Botlek)
- NAM (Velsen)



- Akzo (Arnhem)
- DSM (Geleen)
- GEP (Bergen op Zoom)

I raised two questions for discussion:

1. Given the fact that all companies were using safety issues when selecting contractors, would it not be better to have to a commonly accepted evaluation system that could be shared by all concerned?
2. Once such a system would be available, would it then not be better to have the evaluations done by independent third parties meeting criteria to be developed?

The second issue was postponed till later as most around the table felt positive about the first issue but – at that time – felt that they would keep the evaluation to themselves. They did not want to separate from that responsibility (yet).

### **Formation of a working group**

During the meeting on December 7, 1989 it was decided to (try to) develop an evaluation questionnaire that could be used for safety evaluation of contractors as part of the selection process and which would be accepted by a larger part of the major principals. Thus a working group was formed to include representatives from all companies listed above. NAM later withdrew from the working group but contacts with that company representative remained nevertheless during the development period. Shell participated in some meetings of the working group but never became a member. Shell, however, was one of the first (after Esso) to accept the evaluation system even before it became accredited certification in 1994.

At the start of the working group in 1990 it was considered to involve contractor representatives as well as a representative from the government. For various reasons, however, it was decided to involve these parties at a later stage after the evaluation reference would have reached a certain development stage.

The working group later labelled itself the “Landelijke Werkgroep Contractor Veiligheid”.

Meetings took place about every two months. The chairperson always was the representative of the company hosting the working group. The secretariat was in my hands until much later when contractors became involved and a more formal structure (involving what then became the Central Committee of Experts) became apparent.

### **The process of development**

At first instance, development focused on the making of a questionnaire containing questions relevant to the evaluation of contractor safety issues. It was considered that the evaluation itself would need more than just a set of questions but these other issues (evaluation process, qualifications of people etc.) were postponed until later.

The making of the questionnaire was subject to certain restraints. The most important one was the assumption that whatever questionnaire would come out of the process it would need to be supported by a major part of the companies represented in the working group.



Obviously, the questionnaire also had to allow a step-change in the development of contractor safety and had to stimulate contractors to further enhance their safety efforts.

A number of people involved in the working group (including myself of course as the ISRS representative in Benelux and France) were familiar with the ISRS. It is therefore not a surprise that there are similarities between the questionnaire and the ISRS: questions on the left hand side with value points and explanations and evaluation instructions on the right hand side of the document.

### **Development of the questionnaire**

The questionnaire was developed during a number of sessions and reached a certain level of acceptance by the working group members and their companies. Some members put more effort in it than others and – of course – the role of the secretary (meaning I) was to put everything on paper and offer any changes to the group for approval.

The process of questionnaire development took quite a while as people around the table (also being fed by colleagues within their respective companies) had somewhat different ideas about the number and depth of the questions and acceptance criteria (for allowing related value points per question).

Because of relatively slow progress and developing needs by Esso it was then decided to form a smaller (sub-) group that would speed up the process of making the questionnaire to be approved by the working group. This then took place and resulted in a question set containing about 60 questions.

As the evaluation system needed to have a “minimum acceptance level”, criteria were developed using the value points per question while also indicating a (limited) number questions that had to receive full score. To pass the evaluation, the contractor then had to receive full score on all the “must questions” as well as having an overall score of not less than 60 % on the entire questionnaire.

### **Moving to GSA**

Early 1991 Esso decided to have all their contractors evaluated by an outside party using the questionnaire as it existed then. Details concerning the evaluation process were contained in a contract between Esso and LCC which company was selected to do the evaluations for awarding GSA (General Safety Approved) indication.

During the process between Esso and LCC it was decided to include so-called “verification points” in the evaluation process. These were then accepted by the working group as part of the common evaluation reference.

Within the context of the contract made LCC was named as the sole party to carry out the evaluations. LCC shares were obtained by DNV on July 1, 1991.

It must be stressed that the Esso-LCC activities did not replace the working group efforts but run parallel to these. Experience from the Esso-LCC work was fed back into the working group.



## **An EBB working group**

End 1991 an EBB working group was formed (on the initiative of Esso) to evaluate contractor safety issues and the work of the Landelijke Werk Groep (the questionnaire). The EBB working group also included representatives of major contractor firms. This working group made its report in 1992.

The EBB working group activity led to the acceptance by EBB of questionnaire developed (then being called VCA – “Veiligheids Checklist Aannemers”) while this EBB working group also made suggestions concerning procedures and control mechanisms that would be needed to assure a minimum quality level of the evaluation system. Procedures and controls contained in the Esso – LCC contract were also fed into the EBB workgroup.

Following the work of the EBB working group, EBB decided to accept the VCA system as the industry standard in their area of responsibility.

## **The Raad voor de Certificatie**

Following suggestions made by the EBB working group, the Landelijke Werkgroep invited the RvC (now RvA) during 1993 to give its views on the contractor safety evaluation system.

During these contacts it became apparent that accredited certification was the sensible way forward.

## **The Central Committee of Experts**

As part of the process with the RvA, a Committee of Experts was formed which at the beginning contained voting members (4 from principals and 4 from contractors) and some non-voting members who included representatives of two certification bodies and one from the Government. I was one of these two representing the Certification Institutes.

I think this was the first “Central” Committee of Experts (CCE) that would serve in communication with all Certification Institutes. (For other accredited certification – such as ISO 9000 – each Certification Institute had its own Committee of Experts.)

The membership of the CCE was later limited to principals and contractors only with one government observer. Representatives from Certification bodies were then excluded and I think this must have been end 1995. This followed the thinking that representatives from organisations with a direct commercial interest (certification bodies, training organisations, and consultants) should not have a place on the Committee itself. Contacts with these organisations were structured differently such as to exclude any preference position for any particular company.



## **Accredited Certification**

In April 1994 the VCA evaluation process was accepted by the RvA. Accredited certification was then possible.

## **Legal environment**

To provide legal environment to VCA, a foundation was made involving VNCI and other parties that then became known as the foundation SSVV. Prior to that and for a limited period of time the VCA secretariat was with the EBB.

## **Going beyond the Process Industry**

VCA originally developed within the process industry (see list of companies on the original working group). Already during the time I was on the Committee of Experts, the VCA was extending into other industrial activities including dredging and offshore. I understood that later it also went into the railroad industry and since then it was also accepted elsewhere.

## **Going outside Holland**

Already during the later part of the development process contacts existed with Belgian parties and this led to the inclusion of a Belgian representative on the CCE.

Besides that, a number of contacts existed outside the Netherlands involving contractors seeking acceptance under the system. These international contacts already existed from the time of the Esso-LCC contract mentioned above.

Following activities of one of the Certification Bodies I went to visit Deutsche Shell in Hamburg to introduce VCA there. This resulted in a later meeting in 1994 in Essen with the DGMK. During that meeting the German representatives decided to form a working group to investigate the possibility of having VCA (as SCC) operational in Germany. This process led to accredited SCC certification early 1996.

There have been and are other contacts subject VCA/SCC in other countries of which I have heard but of which I have no detail. Such countries include: Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy, Taiwan, UK, Norway, and Sweden.

## **In retrospect**

I took the initiative in 1989 that started the process that led to the first accredited safety certification (for contractors) in the world. While I took the initiative and contributed to the development of the evaluation system, I would have failed dramatically without the ideas, efforts and support of the others on the original working group and the Landelijke Werkgroep.

Major credit for the development of the system therefore goes to those involved then. They have all contributed to the improvement of safety in industry and – by doing so - have left their mark.



Now that VCA is a success that went well beyond the first ideas of some on the original working group, many others now claim their role in the process. I think they all may be speaking rightfully about what they did but nothing would have been possible without the vision and efforts of those involved in the early days. That, I think, should be remembered. For the rest, it goes as history always goes – it will be and is being manipulated for the benefits of those who manipulate.

END.