

Compare and Contrast: Competent and Qualified Persons in Safety & Health

Several Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards specify the need for competent and/or qualified persons. These terms are **not** interchangeable. Each has its own training and education requirements, as well as a role in supporting safety and health (S&H). This one pager defines, compares, and contrasts competent and qualified persons to help you choose suitable persons to fulfill these roles at your organization.

COMPETENT VS. QUALIFIED PERSONS

A **competent person** needs both knowledge and authority. Knowledgeable of applicable S&H standards, a competent person can identify workplace hazards related to specific work operations. At the same time, they hold organizational authority to correct hazards and stop work, as needed. A competent person must be able to demonstrate their competency of S&H within the topic area with a combination of training and experience.

A **qualified person** has the ability to solve or resolve problems related to the work performed. Many times, they are involved in the design and installation of systems. A qualified person must support these expectations with degrees, certifications, or licensing, or extensive knowledge, training, and experience.

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMPETENT AND QUALIFIED PERSONS

The significant differences between competent and qualified persons are the level of authority and the type of knowledge, training, or experience they have. Employers grant competent persons the authority to take corrective action on hazardous conditions or in hazardous situations. By definition, a qualified person does not need to have this level of authority.

The knowledge, training, and experience required to become a competent person is not enough to be considered a qualified person as well. Similarly, a qualified person's knowledge, training, or experience does not make them a competent person. Qualified persons require more extensive knowledge, training, or experience (or degree/certificate/licensing) related to resolving work-related problems. A competent person's knowledge, training, and experience revolves around applicable S&H standards and their ability to identify work-related hazards.



Competent Person: 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 ([29 CFR 1926.32\(f\)](#))

Qualified Person: One 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 ([29 CFR 1926.32\(m\)](#))

Image retrieved from Microsoft Creative Commons

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

OSHA standards specify any additional requirements your competent person or qualified person must meet. Read the OSHA standards applicable to the work or project to see if your competent or qualified person requires any specific knowledge or skill.

Competent person example: a fall protection competent person must be able to identify hazards with personal fall protection systems, whereas a silica competent person must be able to evaluate situations where overexposure to crystalline silica may occur.

Qualified person example: a trench qualified person must have the knowledge to design the protective system to be used in the trench, whereas an electrical qualified person must be able to determine the nominal voltage of live parts.



Image retrieved from Microsoft (Creative Commons)

CHOOSING YOUR COMPETENT OR QUALIFIED PERSON(S)

It is the employer's responsibility to identify the competent and qualified persons within their organization and confirm these persons can demonstrate their competency and qualifications. With the right combination of authority, knowledge, training, and experience, someone could serve as both your competent and qualified person. Consider these ideas when selecting competent or qualified persons.



Develop a checklist to verify your competent and qualified persons support OSHA's definitions – capture any necessary training, education, experience, certifications, & additional knowledge and skills needed



Evaluate and maintain documentation supporting competencies and qualifications (e.g., degrees or licenses, training/course certificates and test results, training agendas and topics covered, on-the-job training completion, demonstration of their capabilities)



Observe the performance of each competent or qualified person, either in the field or in a simulated work environment, to validate they have the required abilities for their duties



Document your assessment of each employee's ability to serve as a competent or qualified person – keep a record for each person, including your completed checklist, supporting documentation, and any notes on field observations



Create designation letters for each person, to help you identify competent or qualified persons within your organization, assign roles and responsibilities, and grant authority to correct hazards and stop work, if needed



Inform other employees who the competent and qualified persons are so they know who to turn to with questions or concerns



Be prepared to revoke an employee's "competent person" or "qualified person" title and duties if their performance does not meet the established criteria

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website: <https://www.smscx.org/>.