



Certification

Career Guide: Comparing CSP and MSP Safety Certifications

Matt Morgan | May 25, 2023

Safety professionals are valuable assets to a manufacturing business. They assess the workplace for hazards and develop plans to make the facility safer. And a safer manufacturing environment *saves money and saves lives*.

Jobs for occupational health and safety professionals are expected to grow at roughly the same modest pace as the overall job market through 2031, according to the *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*. But statistics may not tell the whole story. The federal government's *focus on bringing work back to the U.S.* is designed to drive demand for more jobs in the manufacturing industry, and with it, demand for more safety specialists.

Industry growth is generally good, but paired with *labor shortages*, it presents challenges for safety experts, who have a specialized skill set. "Now that the safety profession is growing, it's harder for people to stand out while also proving that they have the knowledge, skills and abilities of a true safety professional," says Pete Nemmers, director of training development for the National Association of Safety Professionals (NASP).

Holding a safety certification is one way to grab the attention of employers. Amid a sea of similarly qualified candidates, a certification stands out.

"The true purpose of any certification is to prove that an individual has the knowledge, skills and abilities to do whatever it is they're doing."

Pete Nemmers

National Association of Safety Professionals

A safety certification demonstrates to employers that a person has achieved a high level of expertise and dedication to safety best practices, especially in areas that require technical knowledge, such as machine guarding, lockout/tagout and ergonomics, Nemmers says.

It pays off. Safety professionals who have at least one certification typically earn \$17,500 a year more than peers without any, according to a *2020 survey* by the Board of Certified Safety Professionals

(BCSP) and the National Safety Council.

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The Gold Standard and a New Safety Certification

For the last 50 years, the BCSP has been regarded as the leader in safety certification, with its Certified Safety Professional (CSP) designation being the gold standard.

In 2020, a new certification arrived on the scene, expanding the options for safety professionals seeking to show their worth.

Over the last two decades, the NASP has provided safety training and professional development. In that time, the organization heard from many safety professionals who wanted a high-level certification but couldn't get it, Nemmers says.

"We had multiple safety professionals tell us they might qualify for certifications that were at the technician, specialist or supervisor level, but there were no true high-level certifications that did not require a four-year degree," he says.

"When we started looking into it," Nemmers adds, "we found that somewhere between 30 and 40 percent of safety professionals don't have a four-year degree, whether they're new and they don't have one or they've spent 20 years in the industry and they're simply not going to go back for that degree. We noticed that there's a gap."

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The result of this feedback was the creation of the Master Safety Professional (MSP) certification, which, like the CSP, is accredited by the ***ANSI National Accreditation Board***.

"The true purpose of any certification is to prove that an individual has the knowledge, skills and abilities to do whatever it is they're doing. The way we interpreted knowledge, we wanted to equally weigh experience and education," Nemmers says. "We wanted to have some kind of entry method for those who don't have a four-year degree to get that high-level certification."

Requirements for the CSP Safety Certification

To ***earn the Certified Safety Professional designation***, a safety professional must:

- Have a bachelor's degree or higher in any field
- Have four years of professional safety experience
- Have a qualified credential from the BCSP or other organization
- Pass the 5½-hour certification exam

CSP holders must pay an annual fee and renew their credentials every five years by taking a certain amount of continuing education.

Requirements for the MSP Safety Certification

A safety professional has ***four ways to earn the Master Safety Professional designation***, based on level of education.

MSP track 1:

- Have a bachelor's degree or higher in occupational health or environmental health and safety
- Have three years of professional safety experience
- Have a qualified credential from the NASP or other organization
- Pass the 3-hour certification exam

MSP track 2:

- Have a bachelor's degree or higher in any field
- Have four years of professional safety experience
- Have a qualified credential from the NASP or other organization
- Pass the 3-hour certification exam

MSP track 3:

- Have an associate degree in any field
- Have five years of professional safety experience
- Have a qualified credential from the NASP or other organization
- Pass the 3-hour certification exam

MSP track 4:

- Have a high school diploma
- Have seven years of professional safety experience
- Have a qualified credential from the NASP or other organization
- Pass the 3-hour certification exam

MSP holders must renew their credentials every three years by paying a fee and taking a certain amount of continuing education.

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Comparing the CSP and MSP Certifications

The Certified Safety Professional and Master Safety Professional designations both require a commitment to education and experience, though it's hard to say which is more valuable in the eyes of safety professionals and employers.

Most of the members of the NASP's certification board hold the CSP or the MSP certifications, and, Nemmers says, "most individuals I've spoken to find great merits of both certifications. It's not that one is better or worse than another. We think they simply fill different roles.

"Someone who has a CSP may have a higher role within an organization," he adds. "They might be a director or above, perhaps managing the safety program of a large company with multiple sites and thousands of employees. However, some in that role still have no formal way to demonstrate their achievement in that higher role without a professional designation.

"With an MSP," he continues, "we focus on the boots-on-the-ground safety professional, the ones who are out in the field, the ones doing the incident investigations and providing the toolbox talks and going to the jobsites and getting their hands dirty. We truly wanted it to be that working safety professional's certification."