



“We are doing vital work”

says Nadcap Auditor
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Nadcap Auditor Mike Burnson explains what it's like to work for PRI

Mike Burnson has worked for the Nadcap program as an Auditor since 2020. In the piece below, he describes his role, and what he enjoys about working for the Performance Review Institute.

Mike embarked on his second career in August 2020 when he began training with PRI as an independent contractor, carrying out audits for the Nadcap program. He conducted his first solo chemical processing assignment four months later and has continued to work for us on a part-time basis ever since.

His background means he's a natural for the Nadcap auditor role. He has a university degree in chemistry and had a 40+ year career in the metal finishing industry, during which he worked as an analyst and in product development, sales and management. He believes wholeheartedly in the importance of quality assurance and when he set up his own lab in 2003 he prioritized gaining accreditations – first from Boeing (2003) and then Nadcap in 2006. Having developed close working relationships with his own lab's many customers he has acquired vast knowledge and wisdom in a variety of related sectors.

But having ended his first career on a high and merged his lab with another Nadcap-accredited lab in 2018, why not just relax and enjoy retirement?

“Several Nadcap auditors suggested I might like to apply and I felt it was a good way to augment my retirement income, to travel to new places and to stay involved in an industry I know so well,” says Mike.

“Also, I don't think my wife is ready for me to be fully retired just yet.”

Mike carries out reaccreditations for metal finishing companies throughout the US, Canada and Mexico, verifying that their processes, training and recordkeeping conform to rigorous aerospace and military industry standards. It's important work that ultimately helps to keep the public safe. And on a personal level, Mike says he enjoys seeing new factories, learning new processes and observing technologies that he hasn't seen before.

As an independent contractor Mike has flexibility to arrange his own schedule and aims to work one week on, one week off, with trips further from his current home in North Carolina occasionally meaning he is away for longer. He arranges his own flights, connecting transport and hotels.

Making audits run smoothly

There are several things that businesses can do to help their audits go well, says Mike. Prior to a reaccreditation it's important to have checked that any previous non-conformance reports (NCRs) have been dealt with and the subsequent improvements are being maintained. It's vital, too, to make sure all documents relating to training, job records, labs, maintenance and calibrations are in order and up-to-date. Lastly, it makes sense to show the auditor jobs that reflect the business' customer base and highlight its best practices and expertise.

All in a day's work

Mike also plays a part in making the process simpler and easier. For example, before the first day of a re-audit he provides a suggested schedule to help with planning. On day one, he starts at 08.30 because there's a lot to get through, although subsequent days are dictated by the factory's production schedule. A typical audit looks like this:

- Day 1 – introductions, a presentation by Mike, verification of the audit's scope, a review of any previous NCRs and a job audit (more if there is time)
- Day 2 – more job audits, inspection of the lab and testing
- Day 3 and any further days – more job audits and testing, then a review of personnel and training records
- Final day – a summary of the audit, explanation of any new NCRs, overall commentary and observations on the factory and then a closing presentation

It's a rigorous process but necessary, says Mike:

"Reaccreditation ensures that quality improvements after the initial audit are being maintained and these, plus the reputational gain from accreditation, pay back the cost of the audit many times over."

Would Mike recommend PRI to other would-be auditors?

"Yes," he says. "The auditor plays an essential part in helping suppliers to maintain exacting quality standards, so we are doing vital work."

A good auditor, he believes, is collaborative and respectful to people in the business under assessment – a business benefits most if its audit is carried out with honesty and respect.

"When an auditor works in this way the business' managers and employees recognize that the process has been conducted in their best interests and that all criticism is constructive. We will have been working together to achieve the common goals of product safety and business improvement.

"Nadcap auditors do vital work. I am contributing to the safety of my country and the traveling public."