

Southern Folger Initiates Certification Program For DEC's

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(4/10/2006)

SAN ANTONIO — In an effort to increase the quality of work and accountability for detention equipment contractors, Southern Folger Detention Equipment Company has created a certificate program for all contractors who wish to work with the manufacturer.

The program began earlier this year and firms interested in participating were required to submit qualification materials to Southern Folger by Feb. 10. A four-person panel that considered performance in the field, financial resources and payment history evaluated contractors that submitted materials. Companies that did not meet qualification requirement will have the opportunity to reapply next year.

Those that did make it through the process were asked submit the names of qualifying managers to be certified in field operations and project management. After certification, those managers are responsible for using approved materials, training company employees and conducting self-inspections of completed work.

"We're concerned with the quality of installations that are happening in the marketplace," says Donald Halloran, Southern Folger president.

Southern Folger lists several reasons for starting the program. Often times when a facility has a problem with a device it is hard to get the contractor who installed the equipment to return to the facility and fix the problem, Halloran says. Southern Folger employees have also been to facilities where 10 to 15 years after their product was installed, it fails because it was not installed properly, which sometimes results in the closure of entire housing units.

"It was very subjective in how we select who we do business with and we wanted to get away from that," Halloran says. "We wanted to start from ground zero."

Altering the system ruffled a few feathers, especially among contractors that have been in the business for several years.

"We are not doing grandfathering because that brings us back to the problem that we have of being subjective," Halloran says. "One person will say they have 30 years' experience, but why is 30 years' experience more acceptable than 15 or 20 years."

Halloran says the program could cause Southern Folger to lose business by scaring off contractors that do not want to spend the money or go through the certification process, but he says the benefits outweigh possible negative effects.

"Ultimately, we potentially could lose some business, but we have to look back and say, 'what is that business costing us?'" Holloran says. "Our reputation is on the line."