



## MASTER PAINTERS INSTITUTE

Master Painters Institute (MPI) is an independent standards organization that evaluates architectural coating products against established performance criteria. MPI standards are widely referenced in commercial construction specifications across North America. For architects and specifiers, MPI provides a structured framework for defining performance expectations. For contractors, MPI listings can influence product selection, submittals, and project approval. Understanding how MPI categories function—and how confirmation testing impacts product eligibility—is essential for avoiding delays, substitutions, or unintended non-compliance.



### MPI Categories

MPI assigns coating products to specific categories based on laboratory-tested performance characteristics, rather than grouping them only by broad generic type such as “interior primer” or “acrylic semi-gloss paint.” Each MPI category represents a defined set of minimum performance requirements. These may include scrub resistance, washability, burnish resistance, gloss level, adhesion, flexibility, moisture resistance, and other attributes depending on the product type. For example, interior paints, block fillers, primers, enamels, and high-performance coatings each have distinct category numbers with unique testing protocols.

When a specification calls for “MPI-approved product in Category X,” it means the coating must be listed by MPI as meeting that category’s criteria at the time of bidding and submittal. The intent is to establish performance equivalency without naming a specific manufacturer. It is important to understand, however, that MPI categories function as a Qualified Products List (QPL). Products approved within a given category are not necessarily equal in overall formulation quality, longevity, or project-specific suitability. They are verified to meet the minimum performance requirements established for that category under laboratory conditions. A product may significantly exceed those minimum thresholds, but the MPI listing itself does not rank or differentiate performance above the baseline criteria.

For architects and specifiers, referencing MPI categories provides a level of quality control and competitive neutrality. For contractors, it provides clarity—but also responsibility—to verify that the selected product is actively listed and appropriate for the intended service environment.

### MPI Product Listing and Independent Laboratory Verification

Manufacturers seeking MPI listing submit products for laboratory evaluation. Testing is conducted in accordance with MPI standards, which often incorporate or reference ASTM procedures. MPI’s program is a third-party testing and listing system, and products that meet the required criteria are assigned to the appropriate category and included in the Approved Products List (APL). Laboratory

testing is performed by KTA-Tator, an independent testing laboratory widely recognized in the coatings industry.

It is important to understand that MPI listing is product-specific. Changes in formulation, resin system, pigment composition, or VOC content may require retesting. Even minor adjustments can affect performance outcomes. For this reason, MPI requires ongoing confirmation testing to maintain listing status. Confirmation testing is MPI's periodic re-evaluation process designed to ensure that listed products continue to meet the performance standards of their assigned categories. This is not a one-time approval system; it is an ongoing compliance framework.

At defined intervals, manufacturers must submit samples for retesting. The purpose is to confirm that the product currently being manufactured performs consistently with the originally approved version. Confirmation testing protects specifiers and end users from formulation drift or unreported changes that could affect performance. If a product fails confirmation testing or if samples are not submitted within required timeframes, the product may be suspended or removed from the APL. This can have immediate implications for projects where MPI compliance is specified.

## **Understanding the Limits of MPI Standards**

While MPI categories provide valuable benchmarking, they do not define every performance characteristic relevant to every project. Some project conditions—such as extreme UV exposure, chemical exposure, or high-abuse environments—may require performance beyond standard category requirements.

Additionally, MPI categories are structured around minimum thresholds. A product may exceed those thresholds significantly, but the category designation itself does not indicate relative ranking among listed products. The listing confirms compliance with baseline performance criteria, not superiority within the category. High-performance MPI categories can also be used as a practical way to further differentiate products that may all meet the minimum requirements of a standard category. In many cases, there are numerous products approved in standard architectural categories, but far fewer that qualify under the corresponding high-performance categories because the performance thresholds are more stringent. For example, there is an abundant number of exterior semi-gloss (Gloss Level 5) paints approved under MPI #11, but only a select few are approved under MPI #311, the high-performance category. As a result, specifying or screening for high-performance category listings can help narrow product selection toward coatings that have demonstrated higher levels of durability and resistance in laboratory testing relative to standard-category products.

Specifiers should review manufacturer product data sheets in conjunction with MPI category requirements to ensure alignment with project-specific needs. Contractors should understand that meeting category requirements does not eliminate the need for proper surface preparation, environmental control, and film thickness verification.

## **Key Takeaways**

MPI categories and confirmation testing serve as an independent quality assurance mechanism within architectural specifications. For architects and specifiers, they provide a structured method of defining

performance standards without limiting competitive bidding. For contractors, they require due diligence in product verification and submittal preparation.

Understanding how categories are defined, how confirmation testing maintains compliance, and how listing status can affect project approval allows all parties to manage risk more effectively. When used properly, MPI standards support performance consistency, specification integrity, and long-term coating durability.

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2020 E. Orangethorpe Avenue • Fullerton, CA 92831

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