

# The First Step: Visual Inspection of Welds

BY LINDSEY DECKARD

The terms visual examination and visual testing are used interchangeably for the visual method of testing or inspection (VT). As identified in D1.1: 2004, *Structural Welding Code — Steel*, Sections 6.9, 6.10, and 6.11, VT is the prerequisite inspection method required to be used for welds prior to investing the time and effort in other methods. If a weld cannot pass VT, no further nondestructive evaluation (NDE) methods should be applied until the VT discontinuities are corrected and accepted.

Visual testing is, generally speaking, the fastest and most economical method of NDE. I have seen instances where VT was skipped and the required radiographic testing (RT) was performed first because the visual inspector was busy at another location at the time. When this occurs, the RT films will indi-

cate any existing discontinuities on the surface. It then becomes necessary to go back to the weld (sometimes in a very difficult-to-access location on a bridge or other structure) to prove the indication is actually on the surface, grind it out, possibly repair weld, and RT again to verify the interior of the weld. The added cost in time and equipment in these cases should have been avoided by performing VT initially.

Visual inspection or visual testing is a reliable weld inspection method that should be applied to all welds. Like all other NDE methods, VT has specific limitations. Knowledge of the limitations is critical to the effective application of any inspection method.

There are three important times to employ VT during welding: Prior to welding, visual inspection of the joint configu-

ration and its compliance with the weld procedure specification (WPS) should be verified. During the welding process, proper weld pass cleaning, interpass temperature, and maximum width can be confirmed visually. After welding, VT can identify discontinuities on the weld surface.

The welding inspector should never begin any inspection without his/her basic tools. At a minimum these include a light source, applicable weld gauges (i.e., fillet, hi-lo, undercut), a steel tape, the WPS, and access to the contract specification and the applicable welding code. Also required are corrective lenses if indicated on the inspector's latest visual acuity record.

Some of the more common surface discontinuities to be found by careful visual inspection are shown in Figs. 1 and 2. ♦

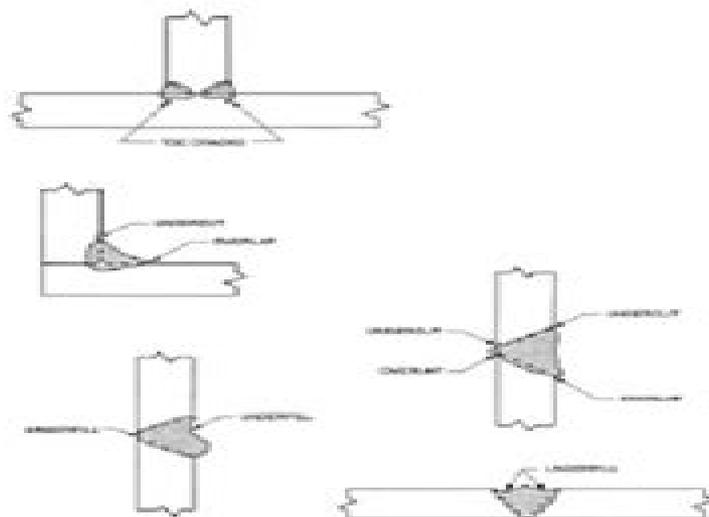
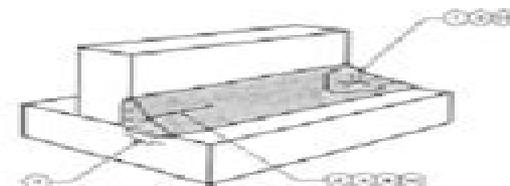


Fig. 1 — Types of weld discontinuities.



LEGEND:

1. CRATER CRACK
2. FACE CRACK
3. ROOT SURFACE CRACK
4. LAMELLAR TEAR
5. LONGITUDINAL CRACK
6. ROOT CRACK
7. ROOT SURFACE CRACK
8. THROUGH CRACK
9. TOE CRACK
10. TRANSVERSE CRACK
11. UNDERBEAD CRACK
12. WELD INTERFACE CRACK
13. WELD METAL CRACK

Fig. 2 — Types of cracks. (Note: No. 4, lamellar tear, cannot be detected with VT.)

Excerpted from AWS A3.0:2001, *Standard Welding Terms and Definitions*.

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# Guide For The Visual Examination Of Welds

**Joacim Rocklöv**



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