



USBC Tiered Center Certification Program Key Points

The United States Bowling Congress has introduced a new **tiered certification structure** for bowling centers, effective with the 2026 inspection cycle. This system modernizes center certification while reducing costs and extending the inspection frequency, benefiting both centers and the broader bowling community.

Key Program Enhancements:

- **New Certification Tiers Introduced:**
Bowling centers will now fall into one of four certification levels based on compliance with USBC specifications:
 - **Gold:** 90%+ of specs met (73% of centers)
 - **Silver:** 80–89.9% (22% of centers)
 - **Bronze:** 70–79.9% (4% of centers)
 - **Standard:** Less than 70% (2% of centers)
- **All Certified Centers Remain Eligible:**
Every tier qualifies for USBC certification, meaning centers in any category can host USBC-certified leagues and tournaments.
- **Inspection Cycle Extended to Five Years:**
Starting in 2026, inspections will occur every five years instead of every three, based on data showing minimal changes in lane topography over time.
- **Fee Reductions:**
Inspection fees drop to \$8 per lane annually, or \$40 total for the five-year cycle (previously \$10/year or \$30 per inspection). First-time inspections remain at \$30 per lane.
- **Confidential Tier Results:**
A center's tier is confidential and will not appear publicly, though center owners may choose to share it.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why did USBC move to a five-year inspection cycle?

Data collected using the Kegel Lane Mapper and USBC's ACE Tool showed that lane topography in centers changed by an average of just 0.016 inches over eight years, with many centers showing even less movement. The average change in compliance findings was under 3%, and not all movement resulted in worse conditions or lanes falling out of spec.

Based on this evidence, USBC's Equipment Specifications Committee and working groups determined that inspections could occur less frequently without compromising quality. Beginning in 2026, USBC will move to a five-year inspection cycle, giving centers more time to address any corrections if needed.

2. **Why did the certification fee change?** Although the total cost increased from \$30 to \$40 per lane, the extended five-year cycle reduces the annual cost from \$10 to \$8 per lane. This shift reflects savings from less frequent travel and inspections.
3. **Will the tier or inspection results be shared publicly?** No. USBC will keep certification results confidential. However, centers may choose to disclose their own tier status.
4. **Will lane conditioning (dressing) be part of tier evaluation?** No. Certification only measures the physical specifications of the lanes, lane dressing is not part of the tiering process.



5. **What happens if a center chooses not to be inspected?** All centers must be inspected to maintain USBC certification. If a currently certified center declines inspection, USBC will request written confirmation of the decision — either mailed to USBC Headquarters, Attn: Center Certifications, or sent by email to certifications@bowl.com.

Once confirmation is received, the center will be placed in Inactive Status in the USBC database. USBC will also notify the local association that the center is no longer certified, and no certified competition, averages, or awards will be recognized from that location.

6. **Does a center's tier affect its ability to host events or how bowler participation is recognized?** No. A center's tier does not impact its certification status. All USBC-certified centers, regardless of tier, can host certified leagues and tournaments. Additionally, all bowler participation, awards, and averages from certified competition held in these centers will continue to be fully recognized by USBC, just as they were prior to the tiered system.
7. **Can a tournament director request a center's tier information?** Directors may request it, but centers are not obligated to share it unless they choose to. Tiers are not used by USBC to determine eligibility for hosting events.
8. **What happens to centers still awaiting their first inspection?** All centers will complete their first inspection under the current three-year model by the end of 2025. The five-year cycle and new fee structure will begin with the second round of inspections in 2026.