

North Carolina
Fire and Rescue
Commission
Certification Programs
POLICY FOR TESTING

Fifth Edition, September 2003



POLICY FOR TESTING CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS NC FIRE AND RESCUE COMMISSION

ARTICLE 1 – SCOPE

It is the policy and practice of the North Carolina Fire and Rescue Commission to develop and disseminate training programs to delivery agencies, and administer a certification system following the criteria outlined by the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC).

A. GENERAL TESTING REQUIREMENTS

1. The N.C. Fire & Rescue Commission shall have on file a signed statement from all Instructor/Proctors acknowledging their intentions to comply with the testing procedures of the Commission.
2. Written and practical examination packages will be made available to the Delivery Agency by the Fire & Rescue Commission, to be disseminated by the Delivery Agency, in sealed, separate packages, to the Instructor/Proctor prior to the completion of each block or blocks of instruction.
3. It is the Instructor/Proctors responsibility to make certain that all paperwork for the class is in order before the evaluation begins, and that all necessary equipment and props are in place and working. The Instructor/Proctor must not open the written or practical test packages until the appointed test time.
4. Candidates must pass the practical skills exam, when applicable to that subject, in order to sit for the written examination.
5. There will be a maximum of two practical skills per test, per subject, if applicable, selected by the school director.
6. Candidates will not be allowed admittance to the test site once the test has begun.
7. The Instructor/Proctor will seal all test instruments in an envelope and return to the delivery agency within 3 days. The test package must be accompanied by the Instructor/Proctors signature and social security number.
8. Test times must be pre-determined by the instructor/proctor and the Delivery Agency.

9. All evaluators for any certification level must be approved by OSFM prior to serving as an evaluator. To serve as a Lead Evaluator for a certification examination, individuals must meet the following criteria:
 - a) Serves as an instructor qualified by OSFM.
 - b) Be certified by OSFM and a Level II Instructor.
 - c) Be certified by OSFM at the level he or she is evaluating. For example, in order to evaluate Fire Fighter II, evaluator certification must be at the Firefighter II level.
 - d) Has attended an Instructor Qualification class. This class shall have written procedures for conducting evaluator training.
 - e) Agrees to abide by all of the rules and conditions stipulated by OSFM.
 - f) Agrees to and signs an "Instructor Agreement Form: when qualified as an instructor/evaluator.
10. Certification exams may also be administered by OSFM employees and assigned and approved by the Program Developer

B. MANIPULATIVE SKILLS TESTING PROCEDURES

1. Manipulative skills shall be examined according to the practical skills examinations provided by the N.C. Fire and Rescue Commission. Procedures for these examinations are contained within the lesson plan outlines provided by the Commission to each Instructor/Proctor. Each candidate will be tested on (two) randomly selected manipulative skills, as provided by the Commission. In some courses, there may be only one(I) practical skill scenario provided.
2. Skills examinations shall be graded on a pass/fail basis, as determined by a minimum score of 70 per cent.
3. Manipulative skills testing shall be conducted separate from the teaching process. The intention here is to prevent the checking off of objectives during times when students are practicing skills or actual teaching is occurring.
4. When conducting manipulative skills examinations, "tested" students must be separated from "untested" candidates.
5. The Instructor/Proctor will be responsible for maintaining a safe test site and shall ensure that all safety procedures are followed.
6. The instructor/proctor shall assure that all personal protective equipment, apparatus and equipment to be used for the test shall meet or exceed applicable NFPA standards or their equivalent. Instructors/Proctors shall not administer any examination where those standards have not been met and shall immediately contact the Office of State Fire Marshal.

7. The host agency, where the test is to be conducted, has the ultimate responsibility for the safety of all parties involved in the testing process. A safety officer should be from either the support staff or from the available members of the fire department who are testing. The safety officer should be an individual with sufficient training.
8. All personnel, including test candidates, evaluators, and support staff shall wear full protective clothing if involved in any practical skills operations in a potentially hazardous position.

C. COGNITIVE EXAMINATIONS PROCEDURES

1. Knowledge objectives shall be measured by a written examination selected at random from a test bank of questions provided by the N.C. Fire and Rescue Commission. Passing grades will equal a score of 70% or greater on each unit examination.

Prior to the exam starting, the Instructor/proctor will hand out response sheets to each candidate and explain:

2. The number of questions on the exam.
3. Candidates are not to make any marks on the exam; they are to indicate their answer on the response sheet provided.
4. Should a candidate have any questions about the exam the Instructor/Proctor may read the question aloud, but may not offer any interpretation or further explanation which may indicate the answer to the candidate.
5. Candidates shall fill out the candidate's information on the answer sheet before receiving the test.
6. Maximum time allowed will be indicated.
7. Candidates may be excused as needed during the test as approved by the instructor/proctor.
8. The Instructor/Proctor shall maintain a quiet and secure environment during the entire time the exam is being administered.
9. Candidates shall be seated at least one foot apart.
10. The only objects allowed on the table shall be the test response sheet, the test booklet, and two #2 pencils.

11. The Instructor/Proctor will explain correct procedure to follow if candidate wishes to change an answer once it has been marked:
 - a) Completely erase original answer choice. Erase carefully and completely.
 - b) Completely fill in subsequent answer choice.
12. The Instructor/Proctor shall inform candidates that any question with more than one answer choice marked will be counted as a wrong choice and deducted.
13. The Instructor/Proctor shall inform candidates that any question not answered will be count &as a wrong choice and will be deducted.
14. The final score is determined by deducting the number of incorrect and blank choices, times question point value from 100%.
15. The Instructor/Proctor shall inform the candidates that all knowledge examinations for certification courses require a minimum of 70% score for passing.
16. The Instructor/Proctor will explain to the candidates that information concerning individual course grades will be maintained by the Delivery Agency. It is the school director's responsibility to notify the candidate of their test results.
17. Any candidate receiving less than a 70% grade will be allowed to apply for re-testing at the local delivery agency. Re-testing must be done within the Delivery Agency's grade reporting period. School Directors or their appointed representatives will be allowed to administer this re-examination.
18. Any candidate observed talking to another candidate or copying from another candidate's paper will be excused from the test and given a zero score.
19. The Instructor/Proctor will pass out the exam booklets face down on the desks. The candidates are to be told not to turn the booklets over until the Instructor/Proctor says begin.
20. The end of the test period the Instructor/ Proctor will state that the test period has expired and to put down their pencils.
21. As the candidates complete their exams, they will be allowed to bring their exam booklet, response sheet and pencils to the Instructor/Proctor.
22. At the end of the testing period, the Instructor/Proctor shall ensure that each candidate returns the test booklet and the answer sheet.
23. The Instructor/Proctor will check each exam booklet for marks, and that all information has been included on the response sheet.
24. After the candidate has completed the exam and all paperwork has been checked, the candidate must leave the room.

25. Candidates will only be allowed to leave the test area to use bathroom facilities and /or to take a break within the building only after turning exam booklet and response sheet face down and raising their hand and waiting for the Instructor/Proctor to recognize them.
26. If more than one room is used for the test, then at least one Instructor/Proctor per room shall be available.

D. ORAL TESTING PROCEDURES FOR COGNITIVE EXAMINATIONS

1. Request For Oral Testing
 - a) Candidate shall make request in advance to the Instructor/Proctor specifying the level of testing and reason(s) for requesting an oral examination.
 - b) Oral examinations should be discouraged except for a temporary physical handicap which may impede his/her writing ability.
2. Oral Testing Procedures
 - a) An official identification must be provided by the candidate to participate in testing.
 - b) Instructor/Proctor will read the questions and the multiple choice answers twice, waiting 15 - 20 seconds between first and second reading. The Instructor/Proctor must read the question as written, neither emphasizing any particular portion, nor eliminating any particular portion, so as not to suggest the correct answer. The Instructor/Proctor will then wait for 90 seconds before reading the next question.
 - c) No other conversation and/or comments shall take place between the Instructor/Proctor and the candidate.

E. AUDITING OF TESTING PROCEDURES

1. Auditing of testing procedures will be conducted by the staff of the N.C. Fire & Rescue Commission, or it's appointed representatives.
2. Auditing of testing procedures will include direct observation of practical skills testing and cognitive examinations.
3. Auditing of testing procedures will be randomly conducted at least once per week in each region, a minimum of 2 per county per year is required. A minimum of 25% of fill examinations given must be audited as outlined.
4. Audits will be conducted without prior notification to the Instructor/Proctor. The probability of auditing will be understood by each Instructor/ Proctor as outlined in this document by signed agreement. (see A-1)
5. An audit form will be provided by the Commission office.

6. The audit will take place according to the following procedures:
 - a) The Auditor may arrive at the test site prior to beginning of test.
 - b) The Auditor will identify himself/herself to the Instructor/Proctor immediately upon arrival and will inform instructor/proctor as to purpose of visit.
 - c) The Auditor will determine whether seal is intact on written and/or practical test packet.
 - d) If practical testing is being conducted the auditor will determine that all equipment necessary is available.
 - e) The Auditor will remain at test site as long as necessary in order to determine that all Fire & Rescue Commission testing procedures are being followed.
 - f) The Auditor will discuss all findings with the Instructor/Proctor.
 - g) Non compliance with testing procedures may subject the Instructor/Proctor to suspension, revocation, or denial as outlined under section 603 of the N.C. Fire & Rescue Instructor Certification Manual, 2nd edition.

ARTICLE 2 – RECORD KEEPING AND TEST BANK MANAGEMENT

1. The Office of State Fire Marshal, as an accreditation entity, will collect and maintain the following data on certification:
 - Names of candidates tested
 - Social security number or equivalent
 - Certification level records
 - IFSAC seal number
2. OSFM makes available to representatives designated by the certificate assembly the tests for all levels of certification.
3. Certification records shall be maintained indefinitely.
4. The test bank system utilized by the Commission is supplied by Performance Training Systems, Inc. This software program is a computer generated and secure system. Each question set has been validated as being job specific and fair.
5. The test instruments will be available in several versions and will be revised.
6. The test questions are generated based on the appropriate NFPA objective and referenced to related IFSTA training materials.
7. All banks are reviewed by subject matter experts following bank purchase, all questions are further reviewed by test construction experts and reviewed for applicability within the jurisdiction.
8. Separate test banks shall be maintained for each level of certification issued by OSFM, all test banks shall include sufficient questions to correlate 100% of the standard. All test banks shall be twice as large as the number of questions used per test generated.

9. Multiple versions of a test, from each certification level, shall be created by OSFM and used by the Delivery Agency for six months. Each Delivery Agency shall shred expired versions of the test.
10. Test Banks are protected and maintained on a stand-alone computer and accessible only by two individuals.
11. Printed copies of the test and answer keys are kept in a locked office.
12. Test questions are randomly generated from the data base on the appropriate test bank and reviewed by the OSFM staff periodically for clarity and relevance to the standard being tested. Random test generation shall include a selection from each major section/topic of the appropriate NFPA standard being tested.
13. OSFM utilizes the following guidelines to ensure certification exam uniformity:
 - a) Exam format is designed to include an area to identify candidates name social security number, and date on the answer sheet.
 - b) Clear concise instructions are given regarding test procedures.
 - c) Candidates are provided information on how answers are to be recorded
 - d) Candidates are provided a specified time allotted for the exam
 - e) Test scores and test items shall be reviewed on a regular basis.
14. The following procedures shall be used for analyzing the corrective action for special circumstances, when questions are challenged or a validation issue:
 - a) The test question/item challenged shall be immediately removed from any test and not be used until the issue has been resolved.
 - b) The question/item shall be reviewed by the OSFM program developer for validity and reliability in regards to the appropriate NFPA standard and reference material.
 - c) The program developer may then submit the question/item to any members of the test validation committee for further review.
 - d) The validation committees review problem questions at the annual instructor's conference.
 - e) Following the review, the question/item may be either retained as written, rewritten, or permanently removed from the test bank.
15. Each Community College or Direct Delivery Agency shall maintain and analyze test statistics including the following:
 - a) Number of persons taking the test.
 - b) Distribution of test scores (it is the responsibility of the community college or delivery agency to report test scores to the candidates).
 - c) Average test scores.
 - d) All test or True/False & Multiple Choice.
 - e) Each test is hand or machine graded
 - f) There are no weighted parts of any examination.

Written Tests

1. OSFM utilizes the following guidelines when developing and reviewing test items for construction of certification exams:
 - a) Introductory Statements
 - b) Multiple Choice
2. Each question is constructed in the form of a direct question or an incomplete statement to measure only one learning outcome.
3. Candidates are provided with four answer choices (the correct answer and three plausible/attractive distracters) per test item.
 - a) One answer is clearly defined as “best” or most correct and cannot be argued.
 - b) All choices refer to the same subject matter.
 - c) Choices are grammatically consistent with the introductory statement.
 - d) Designated positions of the answers vary for each exam question.
 - e) Choices appear in columnar format on separate lines with clearly assigned letters in alphabetical order (a-d).

Practical Skills Tests

1. A random selection of skills process representing a diversity of the appropriate standard
2. Candidates must perform the selected skill that corresponds with the behavioral objectives within the courses of study.
3. Candidates are provided with clear concise instructions.

Written Test Generation

1. Test banks are used for each level of certification
2. Test are randomly generated at OSFM
3. Test shall include a selection from each major section/topic of the appropriate NFPA Standard being tested.

Practical Skills Test Generation

1. Practical skills test are generated by OSFM.
2. Practical skill tests are designed so that the possibility exists that any Job Performance Requirements from a given NFPA Standard can be on a particular skill test.
3. All practical skills exams shall contain a diverse degree of difficulty in job areas.

ARTICLE 3 – APPEAL PROCESS

1. All appeals shall be directed to the N.C. Fire & Rescue Commission Certification Board.
2. If a candidate feels that he/she should be exempt from a particular requirement, has met the requirement in another manner, or that exception should be taken to a requirement due to circumstances beyond his/her control, he/she should send this request in writing to the Commission staff.
3. If a candidate feels that he/she failed a requirement due to unfairness, prejudice, bias, or an inaccurate judgment, then he/she should submit this appeal in writing to the Certification Board. Requests and appeals should provide a complete description of the problem to give the board as much information to work with as possible.
4. All appeals to the board should include a minimum of the following information. Name of person initiating request for appeal. Reason for request. Documentation showing support for request. Any supporting letters, etc., from others.
5. Requests or Appeals should be sent in writing to: N.C. Fire & Rescue Commission Certification Board Post Office Box 26387 Raleigh, N.C. 27611.

ARTICLE 4 – TESTING PERSONNEL POLICY

1. It shall be the policy of the Commission that the accreditation process shall not affect the current certification status of any individual.
2. Candidates requesting certification who are not from an accredited state shall be reviewed by the Certification Board for equivalent certification.
3. Certification reciprocity of candidates from other accredited states shall be automatic upon receipt of the appropriate documentation, and application.
4. Anyone previously certified by the NC Fire and Rescue Commission to a certified standard, shall, upon accreditation by IFSAC, receive reciprocity to that standard.
5. All testing and certifying services shall be made available to all of the N.C. Fire and Rescue Commission Constituents without regard to race, sex, or ethnic origin.

North Carolina Fire and Rescue Commission Standards Training Instructor Agreement

(please print)

Instructor Name: _____		
Social Security No.: _____		
Address: _____		
City: _____	State: _____	Zip: _____
Home Telephone No.: _____	Work Telephone No.: _____	
Date of Birth: _____	Sex: _____	
County of Residence: _____		
Department or Agency: _____		

County Preference for Receiving Upgrade Training: _____

I agree to comply with all policies and procedures pertaining to the delivery and testing of firefighter certification programs as established by the North Carolina Fire and Rescue Commission

Instructor Signature

Date