



IN TODAY'S CHANGING WORLD CERTIFICATION MATTERS

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In his book *The Purple Cow*, Seth Godin shares his philosophy that the key to success for individuals as well as organizations, is to stand out from the crowd like a purple cow in a field of black and white cows.

As a campus fire and life safety professional, what is it that makes you stand out ahead of your peers when it comes to education, knowledge, experience and competence? With more and more employers requiring a college level degree, how does one go about having the edge over their peers with all things being equal? One way is through a continuous improvement program involving continuing education and obtaining a professional credential in your field of practice.

As you've progressed in your career you've come to appreciate certain things regarding your chosen profession. One thing in particular you've come to understand is that it takes a combination of education, training, and experience to accomplish your daily mission and gain respect from the people you come in contact with. This is especially true in the world of academia where you do your work. In this article we'll discuss what certification is and then look at the four fire and life safety credentials offered by the NFPA.

According to the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE), certification is defined as "a voluntary process by which an organization grants recognition to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications or standards and evaluates a person's competence in a particular field of practice."

That's great, we know what certification is but why do we need certification if it is voluntary? How does it benefit us and the communities we serve? As fire and life safety professionals we are part of a system charged

with protecting the health, welfare and safety of the public and with that comes great responsibility. Organizations such as ICE and the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) provide several good reasons on why we need certification.

Certification programs benefit individuals in a particular discipline by defining the field of practice. Defining the field of practice then leads to the establishment of job performance requirements identifying key knowledge and tasks to be carried out in the field of practice, the core competencies. Once the core competencies have been identified, uniform assessment standards are developed to assess the competency of an individual through either a written examination and/or performance evaluation. These activities involve the use of people trained in test development working with subject matter experts from the field of practice.

Now that we have some foundation in what certification is and why it's important I'd like to share with you the role and mission of NFPA certification in helping fire and life safety professionals enhance their job skills and abilities.

The overall mission of NFPA's certification program is to enhance human and organizational performance as it relates to the use and application of NFPA codes and standards. To accomplish this mission, the NFPA Certification Department offers four professional certifications geared toward fire and life safety professionals: Fire Inspector I, Fire Inspector II, Fire Plans Examiner, and our flagship program, Certified Fire Protection Specialist (CFPS).

The NFPA Fire Inspector Certification Program was created in response to repeated requests by local entities,

state agencies, and national organizations for certification programs founded on the NFPA 1031, Standard for Professional Qualifications for Fire Inspector and Plan Examiner, and other applicable NFPA codes and standards. These requests suggested that NFPA be the main catalyst and ultimate certifying body for such programs.

In late 1996, an independent organization conducted research that validated this need. The current Fire Inspector and Plans Examiner certification programs have been operational since 1998 and have been updated periodically to ensure they continue to meet the needs of constituents, are based on current standards, and remain relevant to the field of practice.

The examination test banks and exam forms are written and developed by certified fire inspectors and plans examiners under the supervision of a psychometrician, a person trained in the science of measurement, or psychometrics. Psychometrics involves the measurement of a person's psychological attributes, including the knowledge, skills, and abilities a person might need to work in a particular field of practice.

Each year an independent contractor performs an extensive quality analysis on our examinations to ensure each test form in general and each examination item in particular are valid and reliable in measuring the competency of candidates seeking the certification. There are nearly 2,800 certified Fire Inspectors and Plans Examiners throughout the world today.

While the fire inspector and plans examiner programs are geared more toward those engaged in code enforcement activities, the NFPA Certification Department offers an advanced credential geared to a broader base of disciplines, the Certified Fire Protection Specialist (CFPS) program.

The CFPS program is administered by NFPA under the governance of the Certified Fire Protection Specialist Board. The Certified Fire Protection Specialist Board was formed in 1971 for the purpose of documenting competency and offering professional recognition for individuals involved in fire protection, fire safety, and

fire prevention. In 1998, CFPS and NFPA partnered to jointly offer this highly regarded certification program.

The purpose of the Certified Fire Protection Specialist Board is to recognize, through certification, qualified individuals who are dedicated to curtailing fire loss, both physical and financial, and who have acquired a level of professionalism through applied work experiences and related education opportunities, and through successful completion of a certification examination.

The goal of the CFPS Board is to promote the discipline of fire protection and prevention. While there are no specific college level degree requirements for obtaining the CFPS designation, the credential is based on a balance of education and experience and provides an opportunity for those working in the fire protection field to achieve professional recognition.

CFPS certification provides two distinct opportunities for candidates. First, the process provides the individual with a period of self-assessment and self-improvement during the process of preparing for the examination and documenting professional experience. Second, achievement of certification provides the individual with recognition by his or her peers and employers or potential employers.

CFPS Certificate holders come from a variety of disciplines including the fire service, insurance, design, manufacturing, consulting, property and facilities management fields as well as others who have responsibilities dealing with the application of fire safety, fire protection, prevention, and suppression technologies.

The most recent examination materials for the CFPS credentialing program were developed based on a comprehensive job analysis of the current state of knowledge in fire protection. A national survey of fire protection specialists was conducted to define the body of knowledge of fire protection specialists and determine the content areas appropriate for the examination. The survey was designed to identify the knowledge used by fire protection specialists in the day-to-day performance of their jobs based on frequency and importance indices.

Subject matter experts worked with a professional test

development contractor, a psychometrician, to design the survey, review the results, and identify the body of knowledge. The content of the examination is based on the body of knowledge and reflects the day-to-day practice of fire protection specialists nationally.

Just like the Fire Inspector and Plans Examiner examinations, the questions were developed by experienced fire protection specialists. The questions were then reviewed by a panel of subject matter experts prior to being selected for the examination. The examination questions are continually analyzed to assure they are accurately measuring and performing correctly.

The CFPS credential has been awarded to more than 2,000 professionals and is internationally recognized as a mark of achievement within the fire protection field. CFPS is an American National Standards Institute (ANSI) accredited credential that speaks to your commitment to fire protection, and distinguishes you as someone who is willing to invest the time and effort to enhance your career.

Certifications are becoming more prevalent in our society as technology increases and the demand for competent people is greater. Certification industry leader Melissa Murer Corrigan, President of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence, says "Certification matters. Professional credentials provide employers and employees with recognition for the time and training undertaken to develop expertise within a specific field."

For more information regarding NFPA certification please visit our Website at www.nfpa.org/certification. Be the purple cow and stand out ahead of your peers.

NEW—CCFS LOGO ITEMS—HATS, SHIRTS, PENS and more to come.



The CCFS Membership Committee is offering Tee Shirts to encourage leadership and participation in **Fire Safety** on Campuses nationwide.

The goal is yet another tool to make Campus Fire Safety more recognizable to both faculty and students, and to reflect on the hard work of the fire safety teams on campus. Shirt can be given out and worn year round. People have suggested giving it to RA's, using it as a prize, giving it as a training gift, and even wearing it themselves!

Available in all sizes. Starting at \$12. each. These are available on the CCFS website.

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