

South Carolina
Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation

Division of Fire and Life Safety

SOUTH CAROLINA FIRE ACADEMY

Administrative Procedures
Volume 1

Administrative Procedure AP - 011

Accreditation/Certification Guidelines

Revision: 3

Effective Date: 8-7-03

Recommended by:

[Signature]
Accreditation Supervisor

7/28/2003
Date

Concurrence by:

[Signature]
Operations Manager

8-7-03
Date

Approved by:

[Signature]
Superintendent

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1.0 SCOPE

- 1.1. It is the policy and practice of the South Carolina Fire Academy (SCFA) to develop and deliver training courses and administer a certification system following the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) professional qualification and competency standards and criteria outlined by the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC).

2.0 PURPOSE

2.1. Mission Statement

- 2.1.1. The mission of the South Carolina Fire Academy is to develop an instructional delivery system through which a standardized statewide firefighter training curriculum is developed and implemented to train a maximum number of career, volunteer, and industrial fire service personnel to:

- Develop the skills necessary to command and control emergency operations involving fire, rescue, and hazardous materials incidents.
- Develop the managerial and leadership skills for all levels of fire officers.
- Develop skills in fire department support functions to include public fire education, fire prevention, inspections, and fire investigations.
- We will develop a keen external focus, particularly with regard to our customers.

2.2. Purpose

- 2.2.1. This procedure is designed for application by the South Carolina Fire Academy to administer programs designed to meet International Fire Service Accreditation Congress standards for accreditation.
- 2.2.2. This information is also designed to disseminate and make known all procedures, policies, and methods to all parties interested in participating in the certification process.

3.0 EMPOWERMENT

- 3.1. The South Carolina Fire Academy is established by legislative mandate and is operated for the express purpose of upgrading the state's fire service personnel - paid, volunteer, and industrial. There is currently not a requirement for mandatory certification of fire service personnel. Therefore, the fire service certification system administered by the South Carolina Fire Academy is a voluntary system which is strongly supported by the state fire service associations.
- 3.2. Letters of support are updated every five years as part of the mandated reaccreditation process.

4.0 PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- 4.1. It is the policy and practice of the South Carolina Fire Academy to train personnel to the current edition of National Fire Protection Association Professional Qualification Standards or other standards adopted by IFSAC.
 - 4.1.1. When the certification standard is updated or otherwise modified, SCFA shall adopt the modified standard within three years of the official date of adoption by the NFPA or other standards making body.
 - 4.1.2. SCFA shall not act as the national standards-making body for any standard for which certification is offered.
 - 4.1.3. The certification testing system shall meet or exceed any applicable NFPA safety and health standards or their equivalent.
 - 4.1.4. Equipment and apparatus required for certification testing shall meet or exceed the NFPA standards or the applicable equivalent at the time of its manufacture.
- 4.2. The South Carolina Fire Academy shall abide by all applicable laws, regulations, standards, and guidelines to provide a safe environment for certification testing.
 - 4.2.1. All certification test processes are conducted in the utmost professional and objective manner in accordance with these procedures.
 - 4.2.2. Upon written request the South Carolina Fire Academy will provide documentation of compliance with the procedures of this article within 30 days of such request.
 - 4.2.3. The South Carolina Fire Academy shall maintain documentation of non-compliance with any applicable statute and/or other federal or state regulation that has occurred.
- 4.3. SCFA is a legislatively mandated part of the Division of Fire and Life Safety of the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation (LLR). It is financially supported through legally established assessments and generated revenue. Certification is an integral part of the SCFA program, and is fully funded and supported.
- 4.4. SCFA has and is committed to maintaining a full-time staff of qualified professionals, as well as a network of trained assisting instructors, to support its purpose of upgrading the state's fire service personnel - paid, volunteer, and industrial, including the certification program.

5.0 AVAILABILITY OF CERTIFICATION

- 5.1. It is the policy and practice of the South Carolina Fire Academy to make all testing and certifying services available to all of its constituents without regard to race, religion, color, national origin, sex, or age, except where sex or age is a bona-fide occupational qualification.
- 5.2. Certification services are open to all current members of South Carolina fire departments through all methods of delivery. Members of out-of-state fire departments or brigades are eligible for certification only when it is offered as a part of the SCFA delivery system.
- 5.3. Fire service personnel are eligible to participate in the accreditation system through one of the following methods:
 - 5.3.1. Complete the required South Carolina Fire Academy course(s) and any additional certification prerequisites, and then take the separate written exam for that certification level.
 - 5.3.2. Complete a South Carolina Fire Academy course in which the certification test is included within the normal course delivery. Upon successful completion of the course, the student is certified at the appropriate occupational level.
 - 5.3.3. Apply for reciprocity for an occupational level certification received through an agency accredited by IFSAC for an occupational level offered by the South Carolina Fire Academy. Refer to Article 10 - *Reciprocity and Equivalency*.
 - 5.3.4. Apply to challenge for equivalency for occupational level certification received through an entity not accredited by IFSAC. Refer to Article 10 - *Reciprocity and Equivalency*.
- 5.4. Testing and certifications are made available to all fire service personnel by scheduling certification exams based on the needs of the local constituency and available resources of the South Carolina Fire Academy.
 - 5.4.1. Certification exam dates, prerequisites and requirements to test, times of the test, locations, and registration information are printed in the South Carolina Fire Academy's annual Catalog and semi-annual Catalog Insert, which are mailed to each fire department and SCFA instructor in the state and may also be found on the South Carolina Fire Academy website.
 - 5.4.2. When published, a schedule of all certification test dates and locations is mailed to the Administrative Office of IFSAC. Representatives of IFSAC are welcome to observe any testing process with a 48-hour notice to the South Carolina Fire Academy prior to the date of the examination.
 - 5.4.3. Pre-registration is required for all certification exams and this function is administered at the main campus of the South Carolina Fire Academy for all scheduled exams. After conducting a thorough pre-registration check, course

confirmations or letters identifying reasons for non-acceptance are mailed to the student at least two weeks prior to the exam date. In the case of request exams the appropriate regional office assumes these functions.

- 5.4.4. The South Carolina Fire Academy shall ensure that adequate facility space is available to support certification testing.
- 5.5. It is the policy of the South Carolina Fire Academy that the accreditation process shall not affect the current certification status of any individual.
- 5.6. All certifications issued by the South Carolina Fire Academy are effective for the life of the certified individual for the level and edition of the applicable NFPA standard.
- 5.7. No continuing education process is required to maintain the validity of a certification issued by the South Carolina Fire Academy.
- 5.8. It is the policy and practice of the South Carolina Fire Academy not to delegate its certifying authority to any political subdivision, local government entity or other South Carolina State government agency.

6.0 CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

6.1. General Certification Policy

- 6.1.1. It is the policy and practice of the South Carolina Fire Academy to offer examination for all levels of certification for which accreditation has been obtained.
- 6.1.2. Prerequisite courses required for any level of certification testing are published in the current curriculum catalog.
- 6.1.3. Cognitive skills are tested through objectively graded written examinations.
 - 6.1.3.1. The raw score is rounded to nearest whole number to establish a final score.
 - 6.1.3.2. Written examinations shall require a 70% minimum score for successful completion.
- 6.1.4. Manipulative skill objectives are examined through a process of practical testing usually administered in conjunction with a training course. Manipulative skills exams will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis.

6.2. Selection and Qualifications of Evaluators and Proctors

- 6.2.1. Manipulative Skills Evaluators - All certification courses which require manipulative skill testing for course completion must meet the following guidelines for selection of evaluators and/or test proctors:
 - 6.2.1.1. All manipulative skills tests administered during courses must have a lead evaluator who is either a member of the SCFA faculty or who is selected from outside the host fire department by the Regional Coordinator or Course Coordinator.
 - 6.2.1.2. The lead evaluator will select assisting evaluators, if necessary, from a list provided by SCFA. The Regional Coordinator or Course Coordinator must approve final selections.
 - 6.2.1.3. Except in the case of resident or direct delivery courses using SCFA faculty, the lead evaluator can neither be a member of the host department nor have taught in the course being evaluated.
 - 6.2.1.4. Assisting evaluators may come from the host department provided they have not taught the subject being evaluated.
 - 6.2.1.5. All evaluators must be currently certified and eligible to participate according to the current Instructor Certification Guidelines.
- 6.2.2. Cognitive Examination Proctors - All certification courses which require cognitive testing for course completion must meet the following guidelines for the selection of test proctors and test administration:

- 6.2.2.1. Proctor selection will be limited to either SCFA faculty or instructors having lead evaluator status.
- 6.2.2.2. The test proctor cannot be a member of the host department or have taught in the course being evaluated unless the following conditions have been met:
 - 6.2.2.2.1. The Operations Manager or an authorized designee has approved the proctor in advance.
 - 6.2.2.2.2. The Operations Manager or an authorized designee may audit the test delivery to ensure compliance with accreditation procedures.
 - 6.2.2.2.3. The proctor has signed an agreement to comply with the testing procedures of the South Carolina Fire Academy or has been certified as an authorized test proctor.
- 6.2.2.3. SCFA faculty members are recognized as certified test proctors.
- 6.2.2.4. The Instructor Certification Coordinator maintains a list of all certified test proctors.
- 6.2.3. Lead Evaluator Qualifications - The following are minimum qualifications to be considered for selection as a lead evaluator:
 - 6.2.3.1. Be an instructor certified and eligible to participate according to the current Instructor Certification Guidelines, or a faculty member of the South Carolina Fire Academy.
 - 6.2.3.2. Possess specialty classification in the course to be evaluated.
 - 6.2.3.3. Possess superior skills and have mastered the subject matter of the course to be evaluated.
 - 6.2.3.4. Possess supervisory skills necessary for proper supervision of assisting evaluators and/or students.
 - 6.2.3.5. Have the capacity to objectively evaluate the performance of students as well as the performance of assisting evaluators.
 - 6.2.3.6. Committed to serve as lead evaluator and willing to accept evaluation assignments when asked to do so.
 - 6.2.3.7. Have a positive commitment to SCFA and to upholding SCFA practices and principles, and sign a written agreement indicating knowledge and acceptance of conditions concerning administration for practical skills testing.
- 6.2.4. Any evaluator or test proctor who fails to abide by the guidelines and conditions of SCFA Accreditation/Certification Guidelines manual may be subject to disciplinary action as defined in the Instructor Certification

Guidelines.

6.3. Manipulative Skills Certification Testing Procedures

- 6.3.1. All manipulative skill testing is based on a pass or fail standard.
 - 6.3.1.1. A score of “Pass” shall indicate that a step or skill was performed correctly. A score of “Fail” shall indicate that a step or skill was performed in an unsafe manner or to the point of being ineffective.
 - 6.3.1.2. Evaluators shall judge a student’s performance relative to the skill criteria of the objective being measured. The lead evaluator will have the final decision authority in cases of disputed evaluation techniques or performance questions.
 - 6.3.1.3. Manipulative skills that require two-person or group activities are evaluated for individual credit. All students must participate equally to receive appropriate credit for performing a skill.
 - 6.3.1.4. Each student shall receive two (2) attempts to perform each required skill. Should the student not earn a PASS rating on the initial attempt, he/she will be eligible for an immediate second attempt.
- 6.3.2. Lead and assisting evaluators are prohibited from providing students with any coaching or additional training during the evaluation process. Skills assigned for manipulative skill testing are selected through a process of specific skill testing, random skill testing, scenario skill testing or a combination of the three.
 - 6.3.2.1. In manipulative skills exams where random skills are tested, specific skills to be evaluated shall be selected by the SCFA Course Coordinator or Regional Coordinator from a list of available skills. The list of selected skills will be provided to the lead evaluator.
 - 6.3.2.2. All randomly generated manipulative skills tests shall produce a unique set of skills in each training session.
 - 6.3.2.3. All randomly generated manipulative skills tests shall contain a variety of skills that are evaluated equally and with the same degree of difficulty for each student.
 - 6.3.2.4. The lead evaluator will ensure that students not actively involved in testing are in an area where observation of the testing process is not possible.
- 6.3.3. It is the lead instructor's 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.
- 6.3.4. All evaluations shall use the appropriate South Carolina Fire Academy policies and evaluation criteria as guidelines.

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- 6.3.5. The lead evaluator shall sign all evaluation forms, ensuring that the evaluation forms are completed properly in ink and returned to the lead instructor immediately following the testing session.
 - 6.3.6. The lead evaluator is responsible for maintaining a safe environment while testing is in progress and shall see that all safety procedures are followed.
 - 6.3.7. The lead instructor is responsible for returning the completed course paperwork to the Regional Coordinator or Course Coordinator within five (5) working days.
 - 6.3.8. Evaluators shall notify their appropriate Regional Coordinator or Course Coordinator of any problems or difficulties encountered during the performance of a manipulative skills evaluation.
- 6.4. Cognitive Skills Certification Testing Procedures
- 6.4.1. Cognitive skills examinations are administered in accordance with the policies listed in this article.
 - 6.4.2. The South Carolina Fire Academy will verify student registration and prerequisites and mail confirmations approximately two weeks prior to the test date to each student.
 - 6.4.2.1. A class roster of pre-registered students will be sent to the proctor along with the test packages.
 - 6.4.2.2. Student's names must appear on a course roster in order to be admitted to the exam. Walk-in registration will not be accepted. Student's identification shall be verified with an appropriate photo document prior to issuance of test materials.
 - 6.4.2.3. Any student not on the official test site roster will not be allowed into the test site.
 - 6.4.2.4. Once all admission requirements have been checked and accepted, the student will be allowed to take the written exam.
 - 6.4.2.5. Students will not be allowed admittance to the written exam once the test has begun.
 - 6.4.2.6. Students will be allowed to leave test area one at a time to use bathroom facilities and/or to take a break within the building only after turning their exam booklet and answer sheet face down, raising their hand, and waiting for the proctor to recognize them.
 - 6.4.3. Cognitive skills examination packages are supplied to the exam proctor. Specific package contents and controls are listed in Section 8, Article 8.7.
 - 6.4.4. There shall be a maximum ratio of 30 students per proctor. If more than one room is used for testing, a minimum of one proctor per room is required.

- 6.4.5. The proctor shall maintain a quiet environment during the entire time the exam is being administered.
- 6.4.6. No food, drinks or smoking will be allowed within the room or rooms in which testing is being conducted. Pagers, scanners, radios, cellular phones and other related items are also prohibited.
- 6.4.7. Prior to the start of the exam, the proctor will hand out answer sheets to each student and explain the following items:
- 6.4.7.1. Each certification exam shall include approximately 50 to 150 questions.
 - 6.4.7.2. Students are not to make any marks in the exam booklet; they are to indicate their choice on the answer sheet provided.
 - 6.4.7.3. If anyone should have a question about the exam, the proctor may read the question quietly to the student, but will not offer any interpretation or further explanation that may indicate the answer to the student.
 - 6.4.7.4. Students must raise their hand and wait for acknowledgment if clarification of a test question is required. The proctor will read the question aloud to the student exactly as written.
 - 6.4.7.5. The answer sheet must be completely filled out before students receive their test booklet and begin testing.
 - 6.4.7.6. Before turning the answer sheet in to the proctor, each student's answer sheet must have the student's name (2 locations), the social security number (ID number), the test type and version (test block), and the course code and section number (course block).
 - 6.4.7.7. The time allowed for each written exam is one (1) hour for every fifty (50) questions or any part thereof. For example, an exam with 125 questions would require 2.5 hours to administer. The proctor may conclude the examination process early provided that all students have completed the exam and voluntarily turned in their test booklets and answer sheets.
 - 6.4.7.8. Any student observed talking to anyone other than the proctor while in possession of their answer sheet, copying from another student, or cheating in any way, will be automatically dismissed from the test and given a zero score.
 - 6.4.7.8.1. The proctor shall document any case of cheating and inform the Regional Coordinator or Course Coordinator by the next working day.
 - 6.4.7.9. Test students shall be seated with at least one (1) foot distance from the next student.

- 6.4.7.10. The only objects allowed on tables are the test booklets, answer sheets and #2 pencils. Should calculators, scratch pads or specific reference materials be needed, these materials will be provided by the South Carolina Fire Academy.
- 6.4.7.11. Additional pencils are available from the proctor.
- 6.4.7.12. The proctor will explain the correct procedure to follow to change an answer.
 - 6.4.7.12.1. Carefully and completely erase the original answer choice as this may interfere with the computer read answer sheet.
 - 6.4.7.12.2. Completely fill in subsequent answer choice.
- 6.4.7.13. Answer sheet will be computer scanned and any question with more than one answer choice marked will be counted as a wrong choice and deducted. The SCFA may, in some situations, field grade examinations using a prepared answer key. In these cases scores are verified by computer grading system immediately upon receipt of course package.
- 6.4.7.14. Any question not answered will be counted as a wrong choice and will be deducted.
- 6.4.7.15. The final score is determined by deducting the number of incorrect and blank choices times the question point value from 100%.
- 6.4.7.16. Students will receive written information within 30 days indicating their final score.
- 6.4.7.17. If a student has received a final grade of 70% or better, an IFSAC certificate with a numbered seal will be issued.
- 6.4.7.18. Any student receiving less than a 70% final grade level will be eligible to retest according to the policy in Section 7, Article 7.3.
- 6.4.8. Once instructions have been given, proctor will ask, "Are there any questions?"
 - 6.4.8.1. Any questions will be answered promptly.
 - 6.4.8.2. The proctor will again ask: "Are there any questions?", until there are NO further questions from students. The Proctor will then tell the students that talking will not be allowed after the test booklets have been distributed.
- 6.4.9. The proctor will pass out the exam booklets face down on the desks. The students are to be told not to turn the booklets over until the proctor says begin.

- 6.4.10. Proctor will tell students to turn exam booklets over and find the exam version printed on the exam cover page. The students are to record this number in the appropriate place on the answer sheet.
 - 6.4.11. The proctor will then announce the current time and the amount of time allowed for completion of the exam.
 - 6.4.11.1. After the first hour has elapsed, the proctor will state the time remaining.
 - 6.4.11.2. After the second hour has elapsed, the proctor will state the time remaining or the conclusion of the exam as appropriate.
 - 6.4.11.3. At the end of the test period, the proctor will state that the test time has expired and students are to put their pencils down.
 - 6.4.12. As students complete their exams they will be allowed to bring their exam booklet, answer sheet, pencils and any other provided material to the proctor. The student must then leave the room and may not reenter until the examination period is over.
 - 6.4.13. The proctor will check each exam booklet for marks, and that the correct course code and section number, exam version and other needed information have been indicated on the answer sheet.
 - 6.4.14. After a student has completed the exam and all paperwork has been checked, the student must leave the testing room.
 - 6.4.15. Students shall not remove any test booklet or answer sheet from the room in which testing is being conducted.
 - 6.4.16. Unless authorized by the proctor, students shall not leave the building in which the exam is being conducted while they are taking the exam.
 - 6.4.17. At the end of the testing period, the proctor shall ensure that each student returns the test booklet and completed answer sheet.
 - 6.4.18. The entire examination package is returned to the South Carolina Fire Academy within five (5) working days after the examination date.
- 6.5. Oral Testing Procedures for Cognitive Certification Examinations
- 6.5.1. Requests for oral testing are administered in accordance with the following procedures:
 - 6.5.1.1. A student requesting an orally administered certification exam must contact the instructor, Regional Coordinator or Course Coordinator prior to or by the mid-point of the course to make necessary arrangements.
 - 6.5.1.2. The Regional Coordinator or Course Coordinator will select a date, time and place convenient to all parties involved and suitable for test

- administration. This should be done in conjunction with written testing.
- 6.5.1.3. The Regional Coordinator or Course Coordinator shall notify the student of the exam date, time and location.
 - 6.5.1.4. Once the date, time and location have been set, registration procedures for oral exams are the same as those for any other certification exam.
- 6.5.2. All cognitive skills testing requirements are followed when conducting an oral examination with the following modifications:
- 6.5.2.1. The proctor shall give the student(s) a copy of the examination and an answer sheet to mark their responses.
 - 6.5.2.2. The proctor will read each test question aloud; pause briefly, and then read the answers for that question, pausing briefly between each possible answer.
 - 6.5.2.3. The proctors will then allow 5 to 10 seconds and then read the question and answers a second time.
 - 6.5.2.4. The 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.
 - 6.5.2.5. No other conversation and/or comments shall take place between the proctor and student(s).
 - 6.5.2.6. After reading possible answers for the second time, proctor should wait a sufficient amount of time to allow students to mark their answer choice.
 - 6.5.2.7. After all test questions and possible answers have been read aloud, students will be allowed to request the proctor to read any questions and/or possible answers again.
 - 6.5.2.8. Due to the nature of this type testing, the students must all be in the room at the same time while questions and possible answers are being read. The proctor shall make provisions for two short breaks during the test session.
 - 6.5.2.9. The proctor must stress to all students that during the scheduled breaks, there is to be no discussion of the test among the students.
 - 6.5.2.10. Prior to starting a break period, the proctor will have all students turn test booklets and answer sheet face down on desks.

7.0 RETESTING POLICY

- 7.1. This policy pertains to all examinations administered by the South Carolina Fire Academy including Fire Service Professional Qualifications Certification examinations.
- 7.2. Students must complete both cognitive and manipulative skills portions of the evaluation process, if applicable, in order to be eligible to retest. Any student who fails to complete the entire evaluation process must retake the training program associated with the exam.
- 7.3. Individuals failing to obtain the required minimum score on cognitive skills examinations and/or manipulative skills examinations will be allowed one retest opportunity for each type of exam failed.
 - 7.3.1. For course exams or certification exams administered in conjunction with a training course, students who fail the retest must repeat the entire training course associated with the test(s).
 - 7.3.2. The requirement of the previous section shall not apply to retest for non-course related written certification examinations.
- 7.4. Should an individual fail to earn a passing grade on a manipulative skill on the first attempt, he/she is eligible for an immediate second attempt on that skill.
 - 7.4.1. This must be done with no coaching from the evaluator.
 - 7.4.2. Should the student fail the second attempt, he/she will revert to the 30 to 180 day part of this policy.
 - 7.4.3. The student who does not earn a pass rating on the immediate second attempt shall only have to be retested on the skill that he/she fails and not the entire skills evaluation.
- 7.5. Individuals who fail any certification exam, or any examination required for successful course credit, are eligible to apply for retesting. Such retesting must be completed after at least 30 days from the original test date, but no later than 180 days from the original test date.
 - 7.5.1. The 30-day wait period may be waived for certification tests conducted within a course delivery when such a delay could adversely affect a student's ability to continue in the course. Any retest under these circumstances is conducted at a time convenient with the course schedule but before the end of the course.
 - 7.5.2. Failure to complete the retest within 180 days shall require the student to repeat the entire training course to be eligible to test again.
- 7.6. The 180-day completion deadline does not apply to written certification exams administered independently of training courses.

8.0 TEST SECURITY & RECORD KEEPING

- 8.1. The South Carolina Fire Academy maintains course summary and individual student records for all certification examinations.
- 8.2. Each certification exam is assigned a course code and section number based on the level and location of the exam. These records are managed in accordance with standard South Carolina Fire Academy procedures.
 - 8.2.1. Each certification exam administered independently of a training course is documented and maintained as a separate course record.
 - 8.2.2. Each certification exam administered in conjunction with a course delivery is documented as part of that course record, and is not maintained in a separate course record.
- 8.3. Specific course information that is maintained for certification examinations include:
 - 8.3.1. Registration forms completed by the student, which include student identification number, personal address information, the department represented, and a release of information statement.
 - 8.3.2. The attendance report completed by the test proctor that verifies student attendance and summarizes student scores.
 - 8.3.3. Original student answer sheets. All cognitive skills exams are completed on scannable forms, which are processed, scored and then reviewed for scoring accuracy.
 - 8.3.4. A final course summary, generated after the student records have been processed and transcripts updated, documents that package processing has been completed.
- 8.4. The release of student information regarding certification is conducted in accordance with the following guidelines and SCFA information management policies:
 - 8.4.1. The student registration form contains an information release statement which the student acknowledges by signing the form, and which authorizes release of student information to authorized personnel.
 - 8.4.2. Student information will only be released upon receiving a written request for information signed by an authorized person according to SCFA policy. Information will be sent by standard mail to the authorized requestor, and may not be faxed.
- 8.5. Transfer of student information to the IFSAC Administrative Office
 - 8.5.1. Transferred information shall include: entity number, seal number, registrant first name, registrant last name, registrant social security number, registrant discipline (Fire Fighter, Fire Officer, etc.), registrant level, and date of certification.

- 8.5.2. Only information for successful certification candidates will be transferred to IFSAC.
- 8.5.3. Information shall be transferred in either a hard copy or electronic format that meets IFSAC guidelines.
- 8.5.4. Information shall be transferred to IFSAC once during each calendar month.
- 8.6. Test Bank Management
 - 8.6.1. SCFA shall maintain a computerized test bank for each of the certification levels for which certification is offered.
 - 8.6.2. SCFA utilizes test creation and management software by Logic Extension Resources (LXR), and fire service test banks authored by Performance Training Systems, Inc. (PTS). This test bank software allows for flexible, random test design, automatic exam scoring and statistical analysis.
 - 8.6.3. Test questions are validated using the procedure outlined below.
 - 8.6.3.1. A Technical Review Committee (TRC) composed of subject experts such as practicing fire fighters, trainers, and officers write test items. Each item is:
 - 8.6.3.1.1. Reviewed by the TRC for job relevance and accuracy.
 - 8.6.3.1.2. Referenced to the appropriate NFPA standard and cross-referenced to IFSTA or SCFA training manuals when possible.
 - 8.6.3.2. Purchased test items are reviewed by SCFA to ensure content and job validity for state use.
 - 8.6.3.3. Reliability will be measured as each test is scored. Statistics may be gathered as needed to review certification test reliability. Items to be reviewed shall include:
 - 8.6.3.3.1. Number of students taking the exam
 - 8.6.3.3.2. Distribution of test scores
 - 8.6.3.3.3. Average test score for each exam
 - 8.6.4. Additional test items or test banks developed by SCFA for any reason shall adhere to the same test item writing and validation procedure outlined above.
 - 8.6.5. All test banks are reviewed for reliability and validity on a six-month basis, or as often as necessary to maintain the highest quality certification examination system possible.
- 8.7. **Resident Security** of all written test banks and test copies is maintained in accordance with the following procedures:
 - 8.7.1. Security of the test bank is assured by controlled physical access to the computer, and a computer password required for operation of the computer.

- Only the Operations Manager, Certification and Accreditation Supervisor, and Curriculum Administrative Coordinator have access to the password to the computer.
- 8.7.2. Hard copy test packages are maintained in sealed containers that are inventory controlled.
 - 8.7.3. These test packages are developed and maintained by the Certification and Accreditation Supervisor or an authorized designee.
 - 8.7.3.1. Packages shall include at least 10 copies of each exam offered, adequate answer sheets, pencils, and a copy of the guidelines for examination administration, as well as any other items to assist in exam delivery.
 - 8.7.3.2. Cognitive skills examination packages are inventoried by the Curriculum Administrative Coordinator upon return. Any exam component that cannot be located is replaced with a revised and adequately modified exam component.
 - 8.7.4. Exam packages are released only to the SCFA faculty member responsible for the exam, or to an instructor selected to proctor the exam by the faculty member. Off-site test control and security is the responsibility of the faculty member, proctor or lead evaluator to whom the test materials are assigned. Test materials shall be stored in a secured area.
 - 8.7.5. The Curriculum Administrative Coordinator maintains a record of custody for all examination packages.
 - 8.7.5.1. Any test package not assigned to a test proctor or lead instructor is stored in a designated and secured location at the Fire Academy.
 - 8.7.5.2. Access to the test bank and test packages is limited to Fire Academy staff authorized access by the Superintendent.
 - 8.7.6. Questionable, corrupted or compromised test material(s) shall be destroyed and replaced with revised materials that have been adequately modified.
 - 8.7.7. Multiple versions of each exam can be designed from the total test items available and these versions are revised periodically.
 - 8.7.8. When checking out test packages, each authorized person will have to complete the Certification Test Examinations Content Sign-Off Sheet. A white security tab must be in place prior to leaving. **NOTE:** Tests will not be given to an instructor who is teaching a course unless authorized by the Operations Manager or designee.
 - 8.7.9. After testing, the proctor must count and check for missing test pages, etc. The test package must be returned to the Curriculum Administrative Coordinator's office with the orange security tab in place.
 - 8.7.10. Once the Curriculum Administrative Coordinator receives the test package

sealed with the orange security tab, the package will be checked to make sure that all testing materials are enclosed. The Curriculum Administrative Coordinator will then process the test package.

- 8.8. **Regional Security** of all test banks and tests is maintained in accordance with the following procedures:
- 8.8.1. Each Region will receive an adequate supply of test boxes from the SCFA that will be used for testing purposes. Each region shall request enough copies of all testing material to meet their needs. A supply of white and orange security tabs will be provided along with the test boxes. The white tab will be used for security purposes when a test box leaves the Regional Office and the orange tab will be used when the test box is returned.
 - 8.8.2. Once the regional personnel have determined how many tests are needed for a certain course package, the Regional Coordinator or designee will prepare the test package with all material that is needed and place the testing package back into the secured area.
 - 8.8.3. When the proctor arrives to pick up the testing material, he/she will sign the Certification Test Examinations Content Sign-Off Sheet (CTECSS). The CTECSS will indicate the location, course package, test date, contents, pickup date, proctor name and return date. After signing the CTECSS, the testing material is released to the proctor with the white security tab in place.
 - 8.8.4. After testing, all material will be counted and placed back into the secured box and locked with the orange security tab. The proctor will then deliver the testing box back to the Regional Office.
 - 8.8.5. Once all materials have been returned to the Regional Office, all testing material will be counted, checked for marks and placed back into a secured location.
 - 8.8.6. Each Regional Coordinator will return course packages along with all answer sheets, by normal means, to the South Carolina Fire Academy for processing and test grading where applicable. If the Region needs extra testing material or other supplies, they must notify the Curriculum Administrative Coordinator and material will be mailed to that region.
 - 8.8.7. Approximately every 6 months or as needed, the Curriculum Administrative Coordinator or a designee will update the test material located in each regional office. This will insure our random process during evaluation. Evaluations of our test security program may also be conducted at random.
 - 8.8.8. Questionable, corrupted or compromised test material shall be destroyed and replaced with revised material that has been adequately modified.
 - 8.8.9. If a proctor returns a test package and tests are missing, the Regional Coordinator will conduct an investigation to see if the test material can be recovered. If the testing material cannot be recovered, the Regional

Coordinator must notify the Certification & Accreditation Supervisor. The Certification & Accreditation Supervisor shall prepare a new test revision to be issued to all regions. It will be the responsibility of the Regional Coordinator to pick up the new revision and distribute it as needed. All copies of the corrupted test must be collected and returned to the Certification & Accreditation Supervisor or the Curriculum Administrative Coordinator.

9.0 APPEALS PROCESS

- 9.1. It is the policy and practice of the South Carolina Fire Academy to ensure students are provided an orderly and systematic means whereby they may present and seek answers to appeals concerning South Carolina Fire Academy testing and/or certification procedures without fear of restraint, coercion or reprisal.
- 9.2. Conditions under which a student may exercise his/her appeal rights include:
 - 9.2.1. Non-compliance to written testing procedures and policies as outlined in this document.
 - 9.2.2. Disputed validity of test questions or test answers
 - 9.2.3. Discrimination with regard to race, religion, color, national origin, sex, or age, except where sex or age is a bona fide occupational qualification.
- 9.3. Appeals Procedures
 - 9.3.1. The appellant must make the appeal request in writing to the Operations Manager of the South Carolina Fire Academy within 30 calendar days of the date of the alleged occurrence.
 - 9.3.2. The letter must be specific and detailed with regard to the alleged occurrence including times, dates, location, specific names, if applicable, and specific test question(s) or answer(s), if disputing validity.
 - 9.3.3. The Operations Manager shall attempt to resolve any appeal and notify the student of a decision within 30 calendar days of the receipt of such appeal.
 - 9.3.4. If the decision of the Operations Manager is not agreeable to all parties involved, a request for further appeal may be made to the Superintendent of the South Carolina Fire Academy within 30 calendar days of such decision.
- 9.4. The Superintendent will establish an Appeals Board, which will convene within 30 calendar days after the Notice of Appeal has been received.
 - 9.4.1. The Appeals Board shall review the original appeal and record all proceedings. The Board shall set forth the reasons for its decisions, the vote of each member present, and any failure of a member to vote.
 - 9.4.2. The Appeals Board shall, in every case, reach a decision without unreasonable or unnecessary delay.
 - 9.4.3. Every decision shall be promptly filed in the Office of the Superintendent of the South Carolina Fire Academy and a copy of the Board's final decision shall be mailed to the Appellant.
 - 9.4.4. If the Appeals Board decision is in favor of the Appellant, provisions for correction shall be made as quickly as possible.

9.5. Appeals Board

- 9.5.1. When required, an Appeals Board shall be established to resolve disagreements related to the certification testing system.
- 9.5.2. An Appeals Board consists of six members. The Board shall be composed of a member of the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation Human Resources Division, two South Carolina Fire Academy Faculty members, one Adjunct Instructor, one Educational Professional and one Chief Fire Officer of a South Carolina fire department, who will serve as the chair.
- 9.5.3. Four members of the Board shall constitute a quorum. No fewer than four affirmative votes shall be required for any decision.
- 9.5.4. Failure by the Appeals Board to affirmatively act upon any matter before it shall leave the original action intact.
- 9.5.5. The Board will meet only when called upon by the Superintendent to review appeals.
- 9.5.6. Board members shall not act in any case in which they have a personal interest.
- 9.5.7. In such cases where a conflict of interest may exist, the Superintendent may appoint an alternate board member to represent the same classification as the original member.

10.0 RECIPROCITY AND EQUIVALENCY

- 10.1. Reciprocity is the awarding of certification, without any required testing, to those individuals who have been certified at an occupational level by an IFSAC accredited entity.
- 10.2. Equivalency is the awarding of course credit to those individuals who have been certified at an occupational level to a national standard by an entity not accredited by IFSAC. This course credit allows the individuals to meet prerequisites for other SCFA courses and, provided all other prerequisites are met, to challenge the certification examination for the appropriate level.
- 10.3. Reciprocity is granted to all applicants who meet the following conditions:
 - 10.3.1. Is an active member of a South Carolina fire department.
 - 10.3.2. Submits a Request for Reciprocity or Equivalency.
 - 10.3.2.1. The applicant must submit an original or verifiable duplicate certificate from an entity that grants IFSAC certification. The seal and authenticating number must be readable and intact. Any original certificates submitted are returned to the applicant.
 - 10.3.2.2. The applicant must submit documentation supporting the successful completion of any prerequisite(s) required for the occupational level in which reciprocity is sought.
 - 10.3.3. The Operations Manager or the authorized designee shall review all applications and documentation, and determine if reciprocity shall be granted.
 - 10.3.4. Any student who has previously failed either a written or practical certification examination administered by or through the South Carolina Fire Academy shall not later be eligible for reciprocity for that level of certification.
- 10.4. Challenge Examination Procedure
 - 10.4.1. An individual who has successfully completed a non-SCFA training program and has been certified according to the NFPA standard for that occupational level may apply to challenge the certification testing requirements for that level. The following conditions will apply:
 - 10.4.1.1. Proof of equivalent training must be supplied.
 - 10.4.1.2. Prior training must meet NFPA requirements for the level of certification being sought.
 - 10.4.1.3. Curriculum outlines and course objectives must be supplied documenting that NFPA requirements have been met.
 - 10.4.1.4. Certificates without supporting evidence of course content shall not be recognized as sufficient documentation.

- 10.4.1.5. Certificates presented must be originals or copies that have been authenticated by the issuing agency.
- 10.4.2. The certificates and supporting material documenting equivalency must be supplied to the Operations Manager or authorized designee.
 - 10.4.2.1. The Operations Manager or an authorized designee shall review equivalency applications and determine if the opportunity to challenge an exam should be granted.
 - 10.4.2.2. The reviewer of the equivalency requests should verify through contact with the entity that provided the training that the individual has completed the training and that it meets the appropriate NFPA Standard and applicable accreditation criteria.
 - 10.4.2.3. Should the entity listed on the supporting documents be unable to verify the training or content of the training, it is the responsibility of the Operations Manager or the authorized designee to determine the validity of the challenge.
 - 10.4.2.4. If there is insufficient documentation to reach a valid decision, the equivalency request will be denied.
- 10.4.3. Should the equivalency request be approved, the challenger must pass the written and manipulative skills examination, if applicable, of the courses prerequisite to the certification level(s) to be challenged.
 - 10.4.3.1. Once the Operations Manager or his/her authorized designee has approved a student to challenge a course, the manager or designee will notify the appropriate Regional Coordinator of that approval and direct the student to contact that Regional Coordinator for appropriate course information.
 - 10.4.3.2. The Regional Coordinator will assign the student to a course in which the student can complete the skill session(s) and exams. Course maximums shall not be exceeded to accommodate challenge students.
 - 10.4.3.3. All examination completion requirements and retest policies shall apply to challenge applicants.

Reference Materials

- ! **IFSAC "The Criteria for Accreditation of the Fire Service Professional Qualification System."**
- ! **Southern Building Code Congress, Inc.**
 - " Sect. 111, Boards of Adj. & Appeals
 - " Sect. 112, Appeals
 - " Sect. 113, Board of Appeals Decisions
- ! **South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation**
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