



# Fire Service Training Bureau

## Division of State Fire Marshal

### Iowa Department of Public Safety

## **IMPORTANT UPDATE ON CERTIFICATION PRACTICAL SKILLS EXAMINATIONS**

March 8, 2018

Chiefs, Training Officers and Fire Service Associations,

This update is to inform you of significant changes in the manner the Fire Service Training Bureau (FSTB) delivers practical skills examination for individuals wishing to attain national certification for various levels offered by the FSTB.

During our IFSAC reaccreditation efforts over the course of the past year, along with our commitment to process improvement analysis of the services we provide related to fire training and certification, several deficiencies were discovered in the manner practical skills examinations have been delivered in the past. Some of these deficiencies include, but are not limited to the following:

- Lack of proper facilities (not enough spacing for testing multiple skills stations, lack of rooms/areas to segregate individuals waiting to test, testing and post-testing)
- Failure to test a wide variety/randomized sample of skills from various levels.
- Lack of proper equipment at facilities.
- Lack of adequate staffing to complete proper analysis of individuals demonstrating their knowledge of the required job performance requirements (JPR's).
- Utilizing substandard timeframes to complete proper analysis of individuals.

Certification by the FSTB confirms a firefighter's level(s) of job competency and a department's competency as a whole. The national certification the FSTB provides individual firefighters is a badge of honor which demonstrates an individual's commitment and responsibility to the learning process and to the requisite knowledge attained in a particular subject matter or level. Certification is the verification that a candidate has successfully completed an evaluation of his/her knowledge, skills and abilities against the rigorous national standard(s). A fire department's commitment to certification of individual firefighters is a testament to professionalism and a commitment to our citizens and communities by providing a well-trained and qualified local fire service.

The national standards which must be met for certification are defined by the professional qualification system of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). These standards are now in job performance requirement (JPR) format which is what the FSTB evaluates individuals on during practical skills evaluation examinations. These standards are revised every five years so that they remain current and reflect the true status of the fire and rescue services.

Many of you have heard (and some of you may even resemble) the saying, “firefighters don’t like the way things are.....but they really hate change”. Change often is confronted with resistance to some level because it disrupts our comfort zone of the way things are, regardless of whether or not those things are right, wrong, good or indifferent. The point is change is inevitable and a necessary requirement for not becoming stagnated with the status quo. While change is not always convenient, it is absolutely necessary in process improvements and increasing our level of professionalism and service we provide to the citizens of Iowa. In order to improve and move forward, change is not only necessary, but good. Undoubtedly, the leadership in the Iowa fire service understands and embraces this type of change.

The FSTB recognizes that many safety issues the fire service deals with are the result of improperly trained firefighters attempting to perform skills for which they have not been trained. It is the bureau’s intent to respond with quality skills training and an increase in the individual analysis of practical skills certification examinations. We do not intend on certifying any firefighter who fails to demonstrate the proper proficiency in practical skill examinations.

To that end, we will be making significant changes in the practical skills examinations for certification. At this time, the bureau is not offering any practical skills examinations as we are identifying the necessary changes which need to be made. Written examination test sites will continue to be offered and administered. As with all of the certification levels offered at the bureau, candidates have a one year timeframe to meet all the requirements of the certification level. In response to the gap in practical skills examinations being offered, individual candidate’s one year timeframe will be extended or begin once skills examinations are reconvened.

Once we have the new skills examination process identified we will need and be required to provide adequate training to members of our field staff who assist as evaluators at the practical skills examination sites. It is our goal to accomplish this and begin practical skills examinations again sometime in May.

We are confident the changes we implement will aid in providing a better trained and qualified firefighter and increase safety for all who are involved in the dangers of fire scenes. Periodic updates will be provided as we navigate this improvement. We ask for your continued patience and support as we implement positive changes to increase safety for the Iowa Fire Service and the citizens and communities of Iowa.

Respectfully – Steve

Steve DeJoode  
Special Agent In Charge  
State Fire Marshal Division  
Interim Bureau Chief  
Fire Service Training Bureau  
Ames, Iowa 50011-3104  
Office: 515-294-6850