

ONE MANS OPINION

AIRPORT FIREFIGHTER: 'CERTIFIED' OR 'UNCERTIFIED'

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What possible purpose could there be in firefighter certifications? First off, let's take a look at certifications and licensing in general. What is the whole purpose behind a certification or license? How about a 'formal' acknowledgement that the person has met recognized performance standards in education and training? Would you want a NON-licensed physician performing surgery on you, or would you rather have someone who has demonstrated competency in the art to acceptable established standards and practices? In today's 'litigation happy' world of 'legalities', firefighters are more open to public scrutiny, and therefore are being held even more accountable for their actions or inactions. Remember, there are TWO court systems within in the U.S.: one concerned with criminal actions and another concerning civil action. It is this second system where, basically, anything a lawyer can get past the judge is admissible.

So exactly what are the established standards and practices for airport firefighter certification? That answer somewhat lies in 'where' or 'who' is actually affording the certification. For example, the Federal Aviation Administration, in of itself, does not 'certify' airport firefighters. The FAA does, however, recognize various other entities that do certify firefighters. Various state governments offer firefighter certifications; some in fact, require those working within their state to become 'state certified'. Many



times these 'state certifications' are obtained via state universities or state fire schools, with a requirement for continuing education. My home state of Oklahoma has recently established such a system, referred to as COFT or *Council on Firefighter Training*. As of yet, Oklahoma does not require COFT certification for airport firefighters. Instead, it was designed as an enticement to firefighters to obtain and maintain training by providing income tax credits.

Most state sponsored colleges and universities seek course accreditation from yet other entities, such as Proboards or IFSAC (*International Fire Service Accreditation Congress*). Some private companies and non-profit organizations offer various airport firefighter certifications. The AAAE (*American Association of Airport Executives*) is one such example. Here two

levels of certification exist for the airport firefighter: "Certified Firefighter" and "Certified Master Firefighter". Most of these entities seem to derive the majority of their standards and performance requirements for airport firefighter certifications from two common sources, the FAA and the NFPA.

The FAA's firefighter requirements are located within the Part 139 document. This document, however, is somewhat brief in description of these requirements. For a more detailed description, the FAA's Advisory Circular on firefighter training should be consulted. One should keep in mind, however, that these requirements should be considered as *MINIMUM* requirements. The second source for many entities is the NFPA, or *National Fire Protection Agency*. Even though the NFPA is a non-regulatory agency, once their standards have been adopted by, say, a federal, state or local government, those same standards, in many cases, basically become law.

There are several NFPA standards concerning firefighters. Among them is the NFPA 1003, *Standard for Airport Fire Fighter Professional Qualifications*. As is often the case, this document references several other documents, thereby creating several additional requirements. I'm sure the majority of you know, NEVER "surface read" regulations and standards documents. There is almost ALWAYS an 'adoption by reference' found somewhere in the document.

With all the above being considered, why certify airport firefight-