



Public Information Bulletin

July 2009

Fire Protection Contractor Endorsement Program – Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions

Question: When was this program developed? How long has this been in effect?

Answer: Background work on this program began in 2004 and continued with stake holder meetings for nearly three years until an ordinance was passed by Vancouver City Council in May 2007. Based on discussions with contractors during stakeholder meetings and local trade groups (NW Automatic Fire Alarm Association, Society of Fire Protection Engineers – Cascade Chapter, etc.), a decision was made to delay the implementation date of the new endorsement requirements for 18 months. The original effective date was going to be January 1, 2009 until further discussions with contractors led to another 6 month extension in order to allow additional time for getting staff certified.

Question: Where do I find these requirements?

Answer: The requirements were codified as amendments to the International Fire Code through the Vancouver Municipal Code (VMC). Additional information can be found in VMC 16.04 available online at www.vanfire.org.

Question: Is a Fire Protection Contractor Endorsement required to install, inspect, maintain or test fire protection equipment in the City of Vancouver?

Answer: Yes, however these requirements will not be enforced until July 1, 2009 in order to allow contractors time to achieve the necessary requisite certifications. Any work submitted, started or conducted on fire protection equipment after July 1, 2009, must be completed by a contractor possessing the proper company endorsement and performed or supervised by an employee with the proper individual endorsements meeting the requirements of the Fire Protection Contractor Endorsement Program.

Question: How does one go about obtaining a Fire Protection Endorsement?

Answer: Applications are available on the City of Vancouver Fire Marshal's Office (FMO) website. We accept completed company applications, accompanied by an individual endorsement application for the respective specialty if none has been provided previously. A listing of the requirements needed to obtain an individual endorsement is found in Administrative Rule 9.01, also available on the city website. Multiple individual endorsements can be included with company applications and additional individual endorsements can be added accordingly.

Question: Our employees are currently certified or approved to work in Seattle, WA and/or Portland, OR by passing their respective certification or contractor exams. Will evidence of those approvals suffice?

Answer: No. The FMO does not have staffing to allow review of certification programs from other jurisdictions to ensure they remain current; particularly as the codes and standards evolve with

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each code cycle. The requirements found within Administrative Rule 9.01 were established with input from local contractors through multiple public stakeholder meetings. The adopted Fire Protection Contractor Endorsement Program utilizes certifications that are recognized nationally and represent each of the respective fields without creating additional workload on FMO staff.

Question: What constitutes fire protection equipment that requires a contractor to obtain an endorsement?

Answer: Water-based fire protection systems (wet, dry, pre-action, deluge sprinkler systems, standpipes, fire pumps, foam-water systems, water mist), fire alarm equipment, kitchen hood extinguishing systems, halon/clean agent systems, CO2 systems, dry chemical systems and the cleaning of commercial kitchen exhaust systems.

Question: What is the fee associated with obtaining a Fire Protection Contractor Endorsement?

Answer: There currently is no fee.

Question: Do all employees need to have an individual endorsement?

Answer: No. It is not the intent of the Fire Protection Contractor Endorsement Program to require all employees to have an individual endorsement. The requirements dictate that at least one qualified endorsement holder is on the job site while work is being done on the respective type of system. Additional trainees or employees would work under the supervision of the individual possessing the endorsement.

New Construction/Installation Permits

Question: We have a permit to install a fire protection system that was issued prior to July 1, 2009. Will we be required to have at least one endorsement holder on the job site while we complete that project?

Answer: No. The requirements for work to be completed or supervised by an individual possessing an endorsement will not be enforced on permits to install fire protection equipment if the permits were issued prior to July 1, 2009.

System Testing/Maintenance Questions

Question: Is it required to submit copies of confidence test reports in the City of Vancouver and if so, who is responsible? The 2006 International Fire Code (IFC) states that records of inspections, tests and maintenance are to be kept on the premises for three years and copied to the fire code official upon request.

Answer: Confidence test reports are required to be submitted to the Vancouver Fire Marshal's Office (VFMO) by the contractor performing the inspection or service within 30 days of the service date in accordance with VMC 16.04 which adds IFC 901.6.2.2. The 2006 IFC was amended locally through the Vancouver Municipal Code (VMC) requiring that records be maintained for a minimum of six years on site.

Requirements of the Fire Protection Contractor Endorsement Program, including the submission of confidence test reports from contractors, became enforceable in June of 2007. The requirement for companies and individuals to obtain endorsements is the only issue with delayed enforcement. Contractors must send confidence test reports within 30 days of the service date.

Question: How will VFMO deal with contractors who fail to submit confidence test reports within 30 days?

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Answer: If a VFMO staff member identifies during a regular fire code inspections that a contractor performed required preventative maintenance and failed to submit copies of the test reports, the contractor is in violation of the VMC and will be issued a Notice of Order and Correction and given an opportunity to submit the report. Failure to submit the testing report after the Notice of Order and Correction may result in a monetary penalty.

Question: Will confidence test reports with a service date after July 1, 2009 be accepted by VFMO?

Answer: Testing reports submitted by contractors without an active endorsement will be rejected and the business owner will need to have the testing performed by a contractor with an active endorsement. Contractors or employees without an active endorsement who submit inspection, testing and maintenance reports will be given five business days to submit the Endorsement Application and may be issued a \$1,000 citation.

Question: Is there a fee associated with the submission of confidence test reports?

Answer: Yes. The contractor will not be responsible for or assessed this fee. An inspection fee ordinance passed in November 2006, added Section 16.04.280 to the VMC which imposes fees to recoup a portion of actual costs for certain occupancy inspections, operational permits, and the review of inspection and test reports related to fire protection systems.

Fire Marshal Office staff review the inspection and test reports as they are received. The information is recorded in a database and any noted deficiencies or violations are noted for follow up. The business and/or property owner will be responsible for payment of a \$40 review fee that will be invoiced to the business. The business/property owner will only be charged the \$40 fee once in a calendar year for each type of fire protection system.

Deficiencies noted on inspection/testing reports may result in a special inspection to the site by Fire Marshal Office staff to verify the deficiencies are corrected. If the deficiencies are not repaired, the business/property owner will be assessed a special inspection fee at a rate of \$65/hour. It is important for contractors to document all applicable deficiencies and whether those deficiencies were repaired or not to prevent any unnecessary special inspections.

Question: Will the fees for submitting confidence test reports start in July 2009 with enforcement of the endorsement program?

Answer: No. The ordinance that adopted the inspection and confidence test review fees was separate from the Fire Protection Contractor Endorsement Program ordinance. Fee assessment began January 1, 2008 in accordance with Ordinance M-3768, Amended, 11/13/2006, Sec 1.

Question: Our clients do not want us to perform all the necessary inspection/testing elements required by the respective NFPA document (NFPA 17A, NFPA 25, NFPA 72, NFPA 96, etc.) due to the cost. Customers don't want to pay for a full Inspection, Testing and Maintenance (IT&M) program. What will the Vancouver Fire Marshal's Office do to enforce the required testing?

Answer: Contractors and employees conducting required inspections and maintenance should identify whenever there is a deviation from the required testing. If certain elements of the required testing are omitted at the request of the client due to cost, inconvenience or any other reason, it is an expectation that service contractors detail these reasons on the inspection report. Failure to do so will provide an assumption that the testing was in full accordance with the applicable standard.

For example, if no records exist of sensitivity testing of smoke detectors within the appropriate testing cycle, then it is required for inspection personnel to note this as a deficiency. Or, if no

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records exist indicating that a standpipe or fire department connection has had the required 5 year interval flow test/backflush, this would be considered a deficiency and should be identified as such on the inspection report.

Failure by a contractor to include these details on a confidence test report will likely result in a deputy fire marshal visiting the inspected property to investigate the completeness of the inspection and issues requiring follow up. If a deficiency exists that wasn't repaired after 30 days from original service date (or provide an estimated repair date on the original submission), the property owner will be issued a Correction Notice to fix the deficiency AND receive an invoice from the City of Vancouver for a fire department inspection.

Question: What is the penalty for a business that fails to conduct the IT&M on a required fire protection system as found in IFC Table 901.6?

Answer: A business should expect a special inspection by a deputy fire marshal resulting in a fee and could potentially face a \$500 civil citation for failing to maintain fire protection systems if appropriate corrective actions are not taken.

Question: Are the testing requirements any different for a non-required system?

Answer: No. It is mandatory that non-required systems to be maintained as if they were required. Failure to do so will result in enforcement provisions according to VMC 22.

Question: The VMC indicates that confidence test reports are required to be submitted on approved forms. Are there specific forms we need to use?

Answer: Due to investments by some contractors with paperless inspection programs and internal forms, the Fire Marshal's Office is not requiring the use of Vancouver Fire Department developed forms. However, inspection forms submitted must include all pertinent information required to be tested by the appropriate standard (i.e. NFPA 25, NFPA 72, NFPA 96, NFPA 2001, etc.). Contractors may download forms that were developed by the Fire Marshal's Office if they wish. Fire Marshal Office staff may require contractors to submit additional information if the forms submitted are incomplete.

Question: Can fire protection contractors be found in violation of VMC Section 16.04.140 Amendment to IFC Section 401.3.1, - Making false reports and how does that apply to me?

Answer: Yes. If in the course of testing fire protection equipment, employees initiate more than four alarm signals in a 12 month period to Clark Regional Emergency Services Agency, a civil citation can be issued to the persons responsible regardless of the physical street location. Alternately, if a particular contractor has repeated violations, the FMO can pursue criminal misdemeanor charges for tampering with fire protection equipment.

Sprinkler Contractor Questions

Question: Is this endorsement program redundant with the licensing requirements through the Washington State Fire Marshal's Office (WSFMO)?

Answer: Requirements identified in Administrative Rule 9.01 to obtain a Vancouver sprinkler endorsement requires nothing more than providing verification that the company is properly licensed through the WSFMO. There are no additional requirements or fees. Further, WAC 212-80 requires local jurisdictions to verify that contractors are properly licensed. This program allows the City of Vancouver to verify that any contractor performing work within the city limits is properly licensed.

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Question: Our company is licensed through the WSFMO as a Level 3 Contractor. What endorsements are we required to obtain? Do we need to obtain SSC1, SSC2 and SSC3 endorsements?

Answer: The company would submit an application for a Sprinkler System Contractor – Level 3 (SSC3) Endorsement along with an application for the individual Sprinkler System Designer of Record – Level 3 (SSDR3) Endorsement. Supporting documentation would include a copy of the state-issued Level 3 Contractors License. The individual Designer of Record Endorsement would include a copy of the individual's Certificate of Competency.

Question: We are a Level 3 Contractor providing annual inspection, testing and maintenance of fire sprinkler systems. What endorsement is needed by employees performing testing?

Answer: At least one employee on site during the inspection and testing must have a Sprinkler System Testing Technician – Level 2 (SSTT2) Endorsement. To obtain this, the employee would fill out an application and provide a copy of their Inspection Testing Technician certification from the WSFMO. This allows us to identify that employees are approved to inspect and test all types of water-based fire protection systems.

A Level 1 (SSTT1) endorsement holder would work for a testing company and is limited to inspect only wet or dry pipe sprinkler systems.

Question: Our company was hired to inspect a fire sprinkler system. During our site visit, we saw a water-foam sprinkler system but we were not hired to inspect it. Are we required to mark this on our inspection report?

Answer: Possibly. If your company tested the sprinkler system used to deliver the foam-water solution, then yes, this should be marked as a deficiency needed to be inspected and tested. If this was tested by another firm, this should be noted on your inspection. If your company did not touch any component of that system because it is on a separate riser, then no, you do not need to report that system.

Fire Alarm Contractor Questions

Question: Is it necessary that all portions of a fire alarm system be installed by someone possessing a Fire Alarm System Installation or Repair (FASIR) Endorsement in accordance with VMC 16.04.095, IFC 105.8.2.3?

Answer: No. An electrician, properly licensed by WA State Labor & Industries, is able to run wiring and connect line voltages into a panel without possessing a FASIR endorsement. It is the connection of fire alarm equipment (i.e. detectors, horn/strobes, NACs, circuits in the fire alarm control panel, etc.) that must be made under the direct supervision of someone holding a FASIR endorsement. It is the responsibility of this individual to ensure the installation of fire alarm equipment meets the requirements of NFPA 72. A permit to install or modify a fire alarm system will only be issued to a contractor possessing a Fire Alarm System Contractor (FASR) endorsement.

Question: I have a NICET Level IV in Special Hazards Suppression Systems. Can this be substituted for a NICET Level III Automatic Fire Alarm Systems certificate so I can obtain a Fire Alarm System Designer of Record endorsement?

Answer: No. To obtain a Fire Alarm System Designer of Record (FASDR) endorsement, Administrative Policy 9.01 requires a NICET Level III or Level IV Automatic Fire Alarm Systems certificate. You may not substitute NICET certification.

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New Construction Questions

Question: Will permit applications (FRI) submitted after July 1, 2009 be accepted if the applicant does not possess an active endorsement?

Answer: New permit applications (FRI) for the installation or repair of fire protection systems submitted after July 1, 2009 will be denied at the counter if the applicant does not possess an active endorsement.

Question: Can I request a final acceptance inspection for an FRI permit without an active endorsement?

Answer: Requests for final acceptance inspections for active FRI permits after July 1, 2009 must be made by an employee of a contractor with a valid endorsement. Permits will not be given final approval until the contractor possesses an active endorsement. A temporary final approval will be provided until an application is received by the VFMO.

We will gladly add additional FAQ's to this document as necessary. Please be sure to contact us at the number below if you have further questions.