

Why Should I Certify My Technicians?

My jurisdiction has not adopted the 2007 Edition of NFPA 10

By Norb Makowka

This is a frequent question we receive at NAFED headquarters. The answer may appear to be confusing but it really isn't. There are several things to consider regarding compliance with the most current standards in the industry.

First, the NFPA standards we use in our industry are developed through a consensus standards development process that is approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Most NFPA standards are recognized as a "national consensus standard," which means that they are regarded as the accepted way of doing something.

A standard by itself is not legally enforceable. It must be adopted by a jurisdiction (state, province, or city) as part of the jurisdiction's codes or regulations. Some jurisdictions have adopted the 2002 edition of NFPA 10 and have not updated to the 2007 edition. This means that these jurisdictions cannot enforce the requirements for the removal of the latest obsolete extinguishers, technician certification, or electronic monitoring.

Does this mean you should not follow the requirements of the latest NFPA standard? Our opinion is that you should still follow the latest standard and let your customer know that you are. If an issue cannot be enforced in your jurisdiction, you should inform your customer in writing that the latest national consensus standard should be followed.

Conforming to standards also applies to certifying your technicians. There is a great marketing advantage to having all of your company's technicians certified. You can tell your current and prospective customers that you are complying with the latest standard even though it is not

currently required in your area. As a professional providing life and property protection services, you can say that since it is a minimum requirement, you felt you should comply with the national consensus standard.

Several states, provinces, and cities have their own licensing program based on the passing of a test or other criteria. As the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ), they can adopt their program, stating it complies with the requirements of NFPA 10. That's fine, but what if you want to do work in another jurisdiction or you know that the local licensing program is outdated or flawed? "The Mark of Professional Service" on NAFED's logo should mean something and not just be a phrase on your company's letterhead or tags.

Just look at updated sections of NFPA 10 and ask yourself what non-compliance would mean. Section 4.4.1 states, "Dry chemical stored pressure extinguishers manufactured prior to October 1984 shall be removed from service at the next 6-year maintenance interval or the next hydrotest interval, whichever comes first." This requirement was agreed to by the NFPA 10 committee and went through the full consensus development process which allowed full public review and comment. There were sufficient safety concerns to justify adding this requirement. Shouldn't you inform your customer of this safety concern even if your jurisdiction hasn't adopted the latest code? What if something happened with one of those extinguishers that you failed to remove?

Section 4.4, "Obsolete Fire Extinguishers," added several other types of fire extinguishers to the list of obsolete extinguishers that shall be removed from serv-

ice. Would you leave these extinguishers in service just because the local jurisdiction hasn't adopted the 2007 edition of the standard? These obsolete extinguishers can pose a danger to the end-users, passerby, or service technician. What would your company's exposure be if you knowingly left these extinguishers in service and someone were hurt or the extinguisher didn't work?

The NFPA 10 standard is accepted as the national consensus standard for portable fire extinguishers. You are considered the expert in the field. If something goes wrong and you are required to defend your actions in court or with an insurance company, how can you say you are an expert when you don't follow the latest minimum standard? It would be hard to defend the position of: I knew there was a newer minimum standard but my area hasn't adopted it yet. Not a stellar defense.

And don't forget that certification also applies to pre-engineered kitchen systems. NFPA 96, *Standard for Ventilation Control and Fire Protection of Commercial Cooking Operations*, 2008 Edition states in Section 11.2.1, "Maintenance of fire-extinguishing systems and listed exhaust hoods containing a constant or fire-activated water systems that is listed to extinguish a fire in a grease removal device, hood, exhaust plenums, and exhaust ducts shall be made by properly trained, qualified, and certified person(s) acceptable to the authority having jurisdiction at least every 6 months."

Another good reason to comply with the latest standards? Just review NAFED's Code of Ethics for a reminder of what our members stand for. ♦