



Contractors Qualifications

“Improving the Quality of plan review and inspections - one step at a time!”

Overview of CSA Assessment Services

Are you an Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) who requires NICET certification? Are you an AHJ who administers your own contractor tests? Are you an engineer specifying qualified contractors? Are you a contractor who needs to be able to demonstrate to an AHJ or engineer that you are qualified? If you answered yes to any of these, we may be able to help with options you did not know existed.

In 2002 a registered fire protection engineer serving as a plan review and inspections supervisor with the Phoenix Fire Department founded Codes & Standards Assessments (CSA). With over twenty years in the fire service, the founder was determined to find a high quality and politically favorable approach in which designers and jurisdictions could require contractor qualifications. These tests have been developed to give AHJ's and designers an alternative to NICET and an alternative to developing, administering, or maintaining in-house testing programs.

After leaving the municipal sector we expanded into the engineering/design sector. Here we began to realize the limited number of “qualified” designers and technicians in areas where we were specifying projects. Our definition of qualified means that they have taken a test customized and focused around the task being performed. In this case, fire protection. CSA does not consider taking a training class on low voltage telephone or security systems and getting a certificate of completion as “qualifying” a person to install life-safety systems. Such programs typically fail to adequately cover or even touch nationally recognized standards and adopted codes. Another gap that needed to be addressed is the pipe fitters installing sprinkler systems. Previously there were limited means in place to assess sprinkler installers, and even fewer in place for kitchen hood systems or fire extinguishers. It is important that sprinkler installers understand key principles related to head spacing and obstruction rules, as the plans will not always represent actual field conditions. CSA fills that gap with tailored assessments.

BASIC CONCEPT BEHIND ASSESSMENTS:

CSA assessments are Internet based. CSA performed an extensive search and even switched software until we found the software developer that could meet our standards of security, flexibility, customer support, and a proven record of excellence. The technology of the Internet allows CSA to deliver our assessments world wide. We can easily modify a test structure to keep questions mixed and can see a score as soon as the assessment has finished. This access allows us to print and mail ID cards and certificates usually within a week of an assessment. Our large assessment database is maintained on dedicated secure servers maintained by the software developer. This assures you are using the most current software and dedicated support of the developers. A secure browser program is used to deliver the assessments, which prohibits the participant from viewing source code, printing questions, or otherwise accessing the database.

**DELIVERY:**

CSA has partnered with ACT testing services to deliver assessments at over 230 professionally proctored test locations across the United States. This means that there is at least one facility within a one hour drive of over 80% of the U.S. population. These facilities allow assessments to be delivered daily as the locations schedule allows. Assessment dates, times, locations, and payments are selected and processed by the individual via the Internet. Assessment schedules can even be changed by the participant up to two days before the scheduled assessment. These services are available 24 hours a day giving the participant total control over the scheduling process. To ensure security of our assessments and questions all ACT locations require participants to present state issued photo identification, take a still picture of each participant, video and audio record each assessment, and provide live and video monitoring of each assessment. The competition only offers assessments a few times a year in limited locations, and usually takes months to grade, review applications, and process your results. Unlike the competition, CSA reviews and updates questions as soon as new codes are adopted. Each question is tagged with applicable code editions allowing us to select the appropriate editions for the specific assessment or local criteria. Unlike other agencies, CSA requires individuals to take a new assessment every three years rather than just paying a renewal fee. This ensures that the contractors are staying current with changing codes.

Since flexibility to our customers needs is a CSA priority, we also have several fire authorities that proctor assessments for their area. These range from a single computer terminal in their administration office to using a city's computer training lab with the ability to test up to 30 participants twice a week.

WHAT MAKES CSA BETTER:

CSA assessments are intended to evaluate if the contractor knows the code. Not how long it took them to learn the material. Not how they learned it. Not how many references they can provide. Rather our goal is to establish if they know the material and code requirements. Just because an individual has only been working for a few months does not mean that they have less of an understanding of the code than a person with five years experience. We find that many individuals with less experience will study the code more thoroughly than those with years of experience and think they know the code, but don't.

CSA fully supports any qualification program that effectively evaluates life safety designers and installers to national standards and codes. Many jurisdictions recognize certification through agencies such as the National Institute for Certification in Engineering Technologies (NICET). Although such certification can be thorough and effective, it has limitations and can over-complicate what should be a simple process of ensuring qualified contractors. Limitations include:

- Limited testing dates (local locations may only offer a few test dates per year).
- Limited testing locations (there may not be any local test locations).
- Long and detailed application process (application and experience is generally not reviewed until after test is passed).



- Long wait to get results and certification (3 months or more after the test which may be months out).
- Higher cost (\$180 per test, including retest).
- Requires years of experience to advance to technician and designer levels. Although experience is valuable, it does not demonstrate that they know the code.
- Tests cannot be tailored to allow for local amendments or local needs.
- Very slow to update tests to new code requirements and new technology.

SOLVING THE PROBLEM:

CSA wants to simplify the process while delivering effective assessments. If we can keep the cost down, make it convenient, and adapt to the jurisdictions needs, it is an easier sell to the contractors and political bodies. Electrical contractors who may install 90% of the fire alarm systems can be effectively evaluated to minimum qualifications with CSA assessments. Sprinkler pipe fitters can be evaluated to ensure they can properly address common field conditions. All of this can be achieved by simply logging on to the Internet. Many of the codes already require qualified individuals. Local amendments can require additional qualifications. Are you enforcing your code?

Take a closer look at CSA. If we do not currently meet your needs, just ask. We are here for you. There is no risk and no cost to the jurisdiction. Designers wishing to include us in their specifications can find appropriate language and plan notes in the Engineers and Architects section of our web site.

For additional information visit www.CSAexams.com, email info@csaexams.com, or call 501-679-3345.