

How to Get NICET Certified, Part 2 of 2

By Al Colombo, Technical Writer

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I recently wrote about the history, structure and requirements of the NICET (National Institute for Certification in Engineering) training certification program (see April's "Fire Side Chat"). I believed this topic to be important and complex enough to follow up with a sequel, or elaboration if you will, to that article.

A decade or so ago the only way for a fire alarm technician to receive training on how to become NICET certified required that person's physical presence at a specific location at a precise time. Today, there are myriad options available to the fire alarm technician who wants to further his or her career by becoming NICET Level I, II, III or IV. To find out what those options are, I sought the help of **Michael Baker**, training director for the Automatic Fire Alarm Association (AFAA) of Lake Mary, Fla., and **Charles Aulner**, president of National Training Center (NTC) of Las Vegas.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Mike Baker is Moderator of FNO's NICET section and Charles Aulner is president of National Training Center, one of our sponsors. Please take the time to thank both of them for their effort to assist the fire protection industry.*

Organizations That Can Help

How many years has your organization trained fire alarm techs to attain NICET certification for fire alarm systems?

Baker: AFAA has been providing NICET training for 13 years, but I must point out that neither AFAA nor any other organization really provides NICET training per se. Two out of seven AFAA seminars center on NICET test preparation. AFAA developed the fire alarm system sub-field for NICET in the late 1980s.

Aulner: National Training Center has offered NICET educational opportunities for approximately five years now. NICET test preparation plays a big part in our training programs, but our focus is also on training technicians so they can effectively use the code.

Does your organization train for all four levels?

Baker: AFAA provides NICET test preparation seminars for all four fire alarm system levels. [AFAA offers two courses that cover all four NICET levels.]

Aulner: NTC trains for all four levels in the context of two training courses. Here, we combine NICET Level I and II training into one course and, NICET III and IV in the second. This seems to work well for our clients.

How long does your classroom training programs last?

Baker: The AFAA Intermediate Fire Alarm [NICET I and II test preparation] seminar is a two-day, 16-hour class, and the AFAA Advanced Fire Alarm [NICET III and IV test preparation] seminar is a two-day, 14-hour class.

Aulner: Our seminars are set up to be two days or 16 hours. We do this to reduce the cost of training, plus it better fits with our customers' schedules when the material is taught in two two-day increments.

How many classroom training sessions does your organization offer per year?

Baker: Approximately 100 seminars, including NICET test preparation.

Aulner: We do somewhere between 30 and 50 class-type seminars and 12 Webinars

a year. We also offer online training opportunities on a 24/7 basis.

Approximately how many students do you train for NICET certification over a 12-month period?

Baker: Approximately 1,200 people attend one or more of our seven seminars.

Auler: In an average 12-month period, including our Webinars, I'd say we probably teach 1,500 individuals.

Do you offer classroom training at your headquarters as well as on-site sessions elsewhere?

Auler: We do not hold NICET classes at our office, but we do provide training at many of the fire and security shows held across the country, ADI expos, NBFAA [National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association] and chapter events, and on-site training at specific company's facilities.

What to Expect During the Process

How long does it take the average technician to attain each of the NICET levels from start to finish?

Baker: From personal experience, if the applicant has the work experience required, it should take three to nine months to complete Levels I and II, and six to 18 months to complete Levels III and IV. It took me two years and four tests to satisfy Level IV requirements. Along the way, I cross-certified in Special Hazards Suppression Systems, Sprinkler System Layout and Audio Systems.

Auler: That's a complex question and I can only give you my opinion. It usually takes six months to attain Level I, 12 months to gain Level II, probably two years to get Level III, and three-plus more years to get Level IV. All of this is assuming that you have the work experience required by NICET for each level.

How many training sessions does it usually take for a fire technician to gain certification for each level?

Baker: Again, AFAA provides NICET test preparation seminars to help the attendee focus and review the material that they are expected to be familiar with on a NICET exam. Job knowledge is tested, literally and rigorously via the NICET element examinations. Work experience is as a result of supervised on-the-job training. The NICET technician application includes a work history form in which the applicant indicates their complete, relevant work experience. Level I requires several months; Level II requires two years; Level III requires five years; and Level IV requires 10. An important requirement of this work experience is that it be performed under supervision and is relevant to the sub-field applied for (e.g., fire alarm systems).

Auler: They really don't have to go through any formal training as you can take NICET's test without any. When I went through my NICET testing procedure, there were no training courses accessible to me. I went through it without any formal training and that is the way a lot of people do it. The fact is there's a learning curve associated when you take the NICET test without training like I did. In fact, a lot of things that we teach in our NICET I and II and NICET III and IV training sessions came from my going through it the hard way.

What kind of materials do you provide to your students with in a classroom training course?

Baker: The Intermediate Fire Alarm (NICET I & II test preparation) seminar includes NFPA 72-2002 and a student handbook. The handbook is chockfull of material from NFPA 70, NFPA 90A, NFPA 13, NFPA 110, NFPA 101 and other sources, making it

very useful during a NICET exam. The Advanced Fire Alarm (NICET III & IV) seminar includes a student handbook with material from the Fire Protection Handbook, the NEMA Application Guides, Fire Alarm Signaling Systems, NFPA 72, NFPA 101 and many others, making it, too, very useful during a NICET exam.

Auler: Industry professionals who take NTC NICET training courses receive two books: the NTC Red Book and the NTC Orange Book. The NTC Red Book, titled NICET Testing & Study Guide, covers all work elements in Levels I through IV in the NICET certification program. This book is designed to provide a quick pick list of requirements for each work element. Attendees also receive the NTC Orange Book, also known as 'Chuck Notes.' 'Chuck Notes' is by far the favorite book for those seeking NICET certification. This reference book makes it easy to find code requirements. 'Chuck Notes' is named after Charles [Chuck] Aulner, who wrote it. Students are also given the opportunity to purchase a third book called the NTC Brown Book, Fire Alarm System Design and Installation. This 486-page book offers important information on fire alarm systems, is useful as a training manual and can be used while taking the NICET exam.

Other Course Study, Key Contacts

What other areas does your organization train fire alarm technicians for?

Baker: We offer a one-day Fire Alarm System Testing and Inspection course, a one-day Fire Alarm Plan Review course, a one-day Understanding IBC Fire Alarm Requirements, a one-day Understanding NFPA 101 Fire Alarm Requirements, and we're working on a one-day sales-oriented class.

Auler: In addition to NICET training and training for fire alarm systems, NTC offers training in CCTV and access control.

How can SSI readers gain more information about your organizations' NICET training offerings?

Baker: By calling the AFAA offices in Florida at (407) 833-9133 or by sending an E-mail message to mikebaker@afaa.org.

Auler: They can call us at (702) 648-8899 or they can visit our Web site at www.nationaltrainingcenter.net.