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The next Pro Board Advisory Committee Meeting is scheduled for February 3 in Orlando, Florida. More to details to come...

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The People Continue to Make the Pro Board

Any report on Pro Board activities in the broad realm of fire service certification and accreditation is a report on many dedicated people who commit to an extra, unselfish effort to make the fire service better.

The first *Pro Board Progress* issue of 2006 had the headline of "Thanks to all for a successful Pro Board meeting in Orlando." In reality, every issue is about the same thing: people who serve others and constantly strive to become more effective in their service. This issue takes us to the middle of 2006 and highlights just a few of the individuals and current activities of the Pro Board.

You will be able to read about COA member Kevin O'Connell of Kentucky, who also serves as the volunteer Pro Board webmaster. Also featured is new Board of Directors member Butch Weedon of Montana, representing the North American Fire Training Directors. Fred Piechota, Jr. of Connecticut is also a COA member, but he serves in the additional capacity of leading the Pro Board Advisory Committee. His report on the Advisory Committee is in this issue.

Another news item in this issue describes a job opening with a Pro Board-accredited agency in Jubail, Saudi Arabia. This story provides an opportunity for us all to reflect on the growth of the Pro Board not only in numbers of participants in North America, but also as far as Saudi Arabia. When the founders of the Pro Board accreditation system first wrote about "reciprocity," who could have imagined the possibility of worldwide participation?

And who, 34 years ago back when the foundations of the Pro Board system were being set up with the Joint Council of National Fire Service Organizations, could have imagined that a single Pro Board-accredited certification course could simultaneously provide opportunities for professional development for fire service students in Iraq, Canada, and New Hampshire, as well as in Alabama where the course originated? Such is the promise of online learning. This concept also contains potential problems. This subject is also contained in this issue.

Best wishes to Ken Elmore: Not all of the news in this issue is celebratory. All Pro Board participants are monitoring the progress of Accreditation Manager and COA Chair Ken Elmore, and fervently wishing for a complete recovery as he battles his medical issues. During Ken's recovery, his many Pro Board activities are temporarily being handled by a quartet of other good people. Dave Trebisacci, Pro Board program manager at NFPA, is working with COA members George Luther, Kevin O'Connell, and Fred Piechota to maintain operations during this period. Contact information for all of them can be found on the Pro Board web site at the COA page. Ken will certainly be on our minds and in our hearts until his return. Every Pro Board-accredited agency has been touched by Ken's grace and sincerity as he has worked tirelessly on behalf of the Pro Board and the fire service for more than 40 years. Progress reports will continue to be sent by email.



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For more information about the Advisory Committee, contact Fred Piechota, Jr., at 860-627-6363, ext. 225, or fred.piechota@po.state.ct.us.

Your Pro Board Advisory Committee

By Fred Piechota, Jr., Connecticut Fire Academy

The Advisory Committee, with its broad representation, serves a vital function in the overall operation of the Pro Board by being the direct link for all of the accredited certifying agencies with the Board of Directors and the Committee on Accreditation.

The Advisory Committee is a standing committee of one representative from each accredited agency or entity as established by the Board of Directors in accordance with the By-Laws of the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications. The purpose of the Advisory Committee is to advise the Board of Directors on procedural issues and improvements to the system, and to give direct input to the Committee on Accreditation on the overall operation of the system. Persons selected to serve on the Advisory are appointed by their accredited agency and are generally the point of contact on record for each entity.

The Advisory Committee elects one member from the committee to serve as the chairperson. That person also serves as an ex-officio member of the Board of Directors, serves as a member of the Committee on Accreditation (COA), and represents the Board on the NFPA Techni-

cal Correlating Committee (TCC). The TCC oversees the development of most of the NFPA professional qualifications standards used for certification purposes. The chair is elected for a three-year term and may be re-elected for consecutive terms. Frederick P. Piechota, Jr., Director of Certification, Connecticut Fire Academy, currently serves as chair of the Pro Board Advisory Committee.

Three additional members of the Advisory Committee are elected to serve on the Committee on Accreditation. Each elected member will serve a three-year term and may be re-elected to consecutive terms. Advisory Committee members currently serving on the COA are: Alan Joos representing Utah; Larry Preston representing Maryland; and Gerry Fox representing the College of the Rockies in British Columbia.

Additionally, the Advisory Committee elects three persons to serve on the Johnny G. Wilson Memorial Award Committee. Current members are Larry Preston representing Maryland, John Johnson representing Georgia, and Alan Joos representing Utah.

Meetings of the Advisory Committee are annual. Traditionally the committee meets biannually at the Pro Board's Accreditation Training Conference and conducts a standalone meeting on the off years. The Board of Directors may also call special meetings of the Advisory Committee when needed. The most recent meeting was in Orlando, Florida, at the 2006 Pro Board conference. A 2007 meeting has been announced for Orlando next February.

The Advisory Committee, through representatives on the COA and the Board of Directors, ensures that the Pro Board agencies and entities of the Pro Board system have significant input into the conduct of system operations. The Committee also serves as the voice and advocate of the actual participants in the worldwide fire service certification programs accredited by the Pro Board.



More photos from the 2005 Pro Board Accreditation Training Conference by Julie Coffman.





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PRO BOARD PROGRESS

Published by the
National Board
on Fire Service
Professional
Qualifications

to promote professional-
ism for the fire service
through accreditation
of certification train-
ing, and for the benefit
of Pro Board member
agencies.

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2006 Committee on Accreditation Report

COA Meeting 117, April 19, 2006

The COA meets every two months to consider requests for accreditation, five-year re-accreditation, extensions of accreditation, and delegation of accreditation authority. The COA also hears the Program Manager's report, the website report, and addresses other business related to accreditation.

Annual Re-accreditation

One of the routine requirements of each accredited agencies is to update the Pro Board each year through submission of Form COA-2, *Annual Re-accreditation Authorization*. This form states: "The purpose of this document is to verify current information and data relative to the accredited agency's certification program. Please complete all information on this form, and return to Amy Sturtevant via email to asturtevant@nfpa.org or by faxing to (617) 984-7056 by March 1 of each year." For 2006, March 1 has passed, but several accredited agencies have not provided the updated information. Please access this required form on the Pro Board web site, under the Documents link.

5-Year Re-accreditation Site Visits

The COA is planning an unprecedented number of site visits for the rest of 2006, reflecting significant growth in the number of Pro Board accredited agencies over the last ten years. The many affected agencies are reminded of the need to review several related documents, starting with the *Operational Procedures of the NBFSPQ*, available on the Pro Board web site listed below left, under the link for Documents.

The COA has the responsibility to conduct evaluation site visits every five years to ensure ongoing compliance with the operating procedures of the Pro Board. Agencies seeking five-year re-accreditation have the responsibility to submit an updated *Self Study Document* prior to scheduling a site visit.

Extensions of Accreditation

Accredited agencies may apply to extend existing level of accreditation to new subjects and levels. Requests for extension should be in writing using Form COA 1.1, *Application for Extension of Accreditation*, also available on the Pro Board web site. The applicant agency agrees to conform to the criteria established by the Pro Board as administered by the COA. The applicant describes the standards, levels, and editions to be considered for extension.

COA Members			
	Ken Elmore, Chair		
Julie Coffman	Gerald Fox	Alan Joos	George Luther
Mike Mohler	Kevin O'Connell	Tom Peal	Fred Piechota
Larry Preston	Tom Sturtevant	Liz Summers	

Mark Your Calendars: The next Pro Board Advisory Committee Meeting will be in February in Orlando. Don't miss this opportunity to learn and share. More detailed information will soon be available...



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First Pro Board-Accredited Online Certification Course Completed by Alabama Fire College

Pro Board approval was requested in 2005, but the challenge of this new format delayed the course start until January 2006. Students from Iraq, Canada, New York, and New Hampshire as well as Alabama, took part in the 10-week course which ended March 31.

Distance learning opens up many new and desirable options in fire service training. The biggest advantage is that the student can learn without having to commit the travel expense and time away from home to attend a centrally located fire academy. The biggest threat is that learning at a distance puts a greater responsibility on the student to be a disciplined learner. In addition, classroom instruction skills do not automatically transfer to online instruction skills, and poor program design can allow course completion without assured learning.

The Alabama Fire College (AFC) decided to test the theory, supported by volumes of educational research, that online distance learning, when done right, can reach fire service students who might otherwise not be served by certification courses, and can provide an educational package that indeed assures full learning according to the national standard.

COA concern: test security

Fire Officer I was chosen for the AFC pilot online certification course. AFC has long been accredited by the Pro Board to offer certification for Fire Officer I, II, III, and IV. However, it was a major challenge to satisfy the Pro Board Committee on Accreditation that not only could proper learning occur at a distance, but also that the test could be conducted with the highest level of integrity and security.

The pilot course avoided issues of skills training. Fire Officer I does not require the teaching and evaluation of manipulative skills using specialized tools on the drill field. Such skill-oriented courses as Fire Fighter and Fire Apparatus Operator would not be appropriate at this time for online learning. For Fire Officer I the 40-hour classroom version is supplemented by 15 exercises featuring fire department scenarios that are built around the job performance requirements from the NFPA 1021 fire officer standard.

The online course was designed to have the

same content as the classroom version, but with some important differences.

An early COA requirement was that the final exam be done under direct supervision of a proctor approved in advance. To be approved, a proctor generally had to be a fire chief who signed the approval form and agreed to positively identify the student taking the test as the same individual registered for the course, to accept responsibility for test security, and to monitor the student during the test. A proctor could also be a base education officer at a Department of Defense facility.

Different course design

Course design minimized any temptation or opportunity for cheating or test-taking fraud. A regular classroom course, with certification success based on a single final exam, would seem to provide more temptation to cheat, where a single episode of copying someone else's test answers could provide instant results. The online course is 10 weeks long and has weekly graded assignments. Each successful assignment completion earned points toward the final certification grade. The assignments are written with essay-style responses, which provide a good assessment of subject understanding (more than just subject recognition as in multiple-choice questions), and also allow the instructor to become familiar with individual writing styles. The online course also had a midterm exam and a final research paper. The result was that the final exam amounted to less than half of the course grade. Students had to work hard throughout 10 weeks, but they reported less test-taking stress on the final exam because they were already successful with other assessments.

In starting the pilot online certification course, AFC wanted to limit the number of students to make sure the level of support was adequate for starting this new learning format. Twelve students were admitted. Within the first

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Continued: **First Pro Board-Accredited Online Certification Course Completed by Alabama Fire College**

two weeks three students had dropped out, and a fourth was gone by the end of the third week. This 25 percent dropout rate demonstrates that online learning is not the preferred learning style of every student. Some lack the self-discipline to work independently that is inherently a part of distant learning. One of the lessons learned for this first experience is that online students should not be aggressively recruited to participate in an online learning course. Instead, it is better to present a full picture of the advantages and possible disadvantages of online learning, depending on individual differences, and let the student make a personal choice. If a superior officer sends a student to an online class, but the student does not want to learn that way, the risk of dropping out is high.

Student interaction

For those who completed the course, especially those who were far away from an available classroom, there was high enthusiasm for the online format. Students learn from each other in addition to learning from the instructor. Classroom discussions and group projects are examples. In this online distance learning course, including student interaction in the course design helped give all students a sense of group cohesion similar to that experienced in the classroom. This was accomplished through written assignments that were shared with all the class. Students observed how there can be different perspectives on a similar fire officer job task.

To assure that each student remained focused on, and learned from, the written positions of the other students, each person had to publicly reply to the others with reasons why they agreed or disagreed with a position stated. Reticent students who may not actively engage in group discussions in class generally found it

easier to post written comments, which could be more thoroughly thought through before being committed to writing and posted for all to see.

This type of interaction and peer learning was facilitated during each week because each student could carefully write their own assignments, review the other student positions, and craft a response according to their own schedule. That is, one student might prefer to do the course work during early morning hours; another may prefer to work late at night; another student may need to hold everything for the weekends. Each student posted his work according to their own schedule, but sometime during the week everyone could see what everyone else had posted and add another comment to the posted material. The effect was that all students were freely communicating with each other and adding to the group understanding of each week's subject area, but they were not doing this communicating at the same time. It really does have an impact similar to having classroom discussions.

Testing technology

For those still concerned about test security at a distance, consider that the course management software that was used to present the course materials and the assessments has built-in security measures. The final certification test uses the usual test banks used in most accredited certification courses. Tests are opened electronically at the same time, with a time limit, so that one student is prevented from informing another student about test contents. Each test can have randomized questions from the same test bank, so that two students taking the test in the same room cannot help each other. In effect, they have different tests. Each test is time-limited to not allow time for any student to look up answers in a text. In any event, the approved test proctor has signed an agreement to supervise the student during the test and maintain security.

AFC is planning additional courses, but there were lessons learned. Some things would definitely be changed next time.

For more information about what worked... and what didn't work...with the Alabama Fire College online certification course, contact Jerry Laughlin at 205-391-3768, or at jlaughlin@alabamafirecollege.org.





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Tell Us About Your Agency Activities

Articles for the next *Pro Board Progress* are being planned now.

Contact newsletter editor Jerry Laughlin jlaughlin@alabamafirecollege.org or 205-391-3768 with information about your agency activities that we can highlight in a future issue of the newsletter.

www.theproboard.org

Job Opportunity for Fire and Rescue Instructor

Pro Board-Accredited Agency in Jubail, Saudi Arabia

Contact Najeeb Ibrahim Al-Wabli at wablini@sabic.com

Job Summary

Responsible for advising, planning, developing and conducting NBFSPQ and IFSAC accredited emergency response, life safety, structural, and industrial fire training programs which qualify SABIC affiliate personnel as certified emergency responders in industrial complex emergencies as outlined by NFPA codes and standards...Responsible for curriculum development in accordance with world standards...Responsible for overall delivery of NBFSPQ and IFSAC accredited emergency response training programs to SABIC and its affiliate companies...Focal point for advising SABIC affiliates on all matters pertaining to fire protection.

Major Roles and Responsibilities

Overall training and educational delivery... Development and implementation of training programs for SABIC affiliates...Development of lesson plans and course curriculum...Ensure for the continued development of the Saudi staff.

Critical Skills and Job Complexity

Knowledge and Skills

Academic

Engineering graduate preferred, associate degree in fire protection.

Fundamental

Client service orientated...Excellent communication skills...Writing and report generation skills...Accredited Fire Service Instructor Level II...Computer literacy...ISO, TQM, NBFSPQ and IFSAC accreditation requirements...NFPA standards...Course writing and development...Ability to establish training program goals...Ability to establish lesson plan objectives...Training program administration...Organization and time management...Prioritization and job planning...Budgeting and fiscal management...Overall appreciation of SFTC-Operations (Training)...Overall appreciation of SFTC client requirements and needs...Modern emergency response processes and procedures

Related Experience

Five years petrochemical fire service or related field. Five years in a supervisory or training position.

Know How

Knowledge of fire prevention, life safety, and rescue practices based on recognized training practices...Ability to conduct classroom and practical applications of each...Ability to prepare comprehensive training reports and develop clear and concise lesson plans...Knowledge of industrial fire department operations, maintenance, and associated equipment.

Contacts

Internal: Maintain a close working relationship with all SFTC staff and SABIC personnel.

External: Maintains a close teacher/student relationship with all Affiliate Trainees...Interacts with affiliates, Royal Commission, and civil defense support groups.

Problem Solving

Ability to identify and correct problems in the training curriculum...Ability to identify and assist with trainees learning needs and help in identifying and solving their problems.

Decision Making

Ability to make safe, rational decisions in live fire training exercises or in actual emergency situations.

Operating Limits

As outlined by SABIC and SFTC procedures.

General

Perform other duties as assigned by the management.



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Kevin O'Connell

Pro Board expansion, O'Connell style (below): With Nova Scotia now accredited, Kevin and George Luther aggressively market the system to Labrador, represented by Maggie.



Contact Kevin O'Connell at koconnell@theproboard.org.

www.theproboard.org

COA Member Profile: Kevin O'Connell

There is nothing typical about Kevin O'Connell. He has served the Pro Board for almost 15 years, but he is not affiliated with a Pro Board-accredited agency. Fortunately this highly capable and dedicated individual maintains an untiring commitment to the ideals of the Pro Board accreditation system and improving fire service professionalism.

The fire service and the Pro Board almost lost out on Kevin O'Connell's talents and leadership. He almost became a cop. At least that is what he was being encouraged to do when a fire fighter entrance test was announced in Louisville, Kentucky. Kevin was a civilian employee with the police department. His boss, a police officer, was urging Kevin to become a cop, but Kevin knew that path was not for him. We can be grateful to that boss, because when he saw that he wasn't convincing Kevin on the police side, he was the person who encouraged Kevin to become a fire fighter.

Kevin passed the test, but when he showed up for recruit school, he says he didn't know a thing about the fire department. By the end of recruit school he was at the top of his class. After several months on the job, the usual indoctrination at the company level, and a few nights without sleep he remembers thinking; "This is exactly where I belong." To this day he really believes in the altruistic nature of public service.

As Kevin worked his way up through the Louisville Fire Department, an assignment as the Research and Development Officer included development of the training piece for each new project and frequent instructional

assignments at the training academy. Kevin explained. "I really enjoyed being a fire fighter. As experience on the job bestowed its gift of confidence upon me, it also revealed how much more there was to learn. That led me to a dif-

ferent perspective on training. I eventually enjoyed a position where I was able to help foster an organizational commitment to training."

It took an almost chance event to lead Kevin to his long affiliation with the Pro Board.

Louisville Fire Chief Russ Sanders was active in national fire service activities, and he asked Kevin if he had an interest in getting involved with the Pro Board Committee on Accreditation. A young District Chief at the time, Kevin responded as any reasonable officer would when the Chief asks you to do something. He told Chief Sanders, "Yes, but let me check with my wife."

That led Kevin to call then COA Chair George Luther. Remembers Kevin: "From that first call George made me feel like I was welcome and could contribute." Kevin said he was grateful to be involved and be associated with the Pro Board leaders of the time.

His service has rewarded Kevin with the excitement of seeing the Pro Board grow through what he calls a "renaissance" of certification in the fire service.

"The whole concept of affirming one's professional stature against national standards and portability of credentials," Kevin says, "is more important than ever. Pro Board credentials are valued, and we see it in the types of inquiries and comments we get at conferences and via email. How can you not be proud to be part of that system?"

Kevin created the first Pro Board web site, and he has maintained this important communications tool for about 10 years now.

Kevin wonders where the Pro Board will go in the next 10 years, noting that the demand curve is still moving up. "The future will certainly be interesting," he says. "I continue to be incredibly grateful for my opportunities to be involved with the Pro Board. I have clearly received more than I have given. I hope to stay involved. I've been so lucky to work with so many talented and dedicated people on the COA, the Board and the various accredited agencies."



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Fire Services Training School (FSTS) at Montana State University

FSTS serves all of Montana's fire departments, companies and districts, consisting of an estimated 9,600 members in 355 organizations, 96% of which are volunteers. The FSTS develops and operates programs which make local government effective in their mission of providing quality fire and rescue service to the public. FSTS supports and promotes: (a) "standard of care" operations, (b) self-sustained training programs within local organizations, (c) sharing of resources between organizations, and (d) individual growth of emergency service personnel through training.

www.theproboard.org

Board of Directors Profile

Butch Weedon, Director, Montana Fire Services Training School

The Board of Directors of the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications is comprised of one representative of each of the five fire service organizations that sponsored the National Professional Qualifications System. Butch Weedon represents the North American Fire Training Directors (NAFTD).

Butch Weedon, Director of the Montana Fire Services Training School, is a relatively new member of the Board of Directors, but he brings impressive credentials from more than 40 years of involvement with the fire service and state-level training. He was appointed in 2005 by Adam Piskura, then-president of the North American Fire Training Directors.

With 25 years as director in Montana, Butch is the longest-serving state fire director in the United States. His career started in the early 1960s as a junior fire fighter in Maryland, and then he continued as a volunteer fire fighter as soon as he was old enough to join as a full member.

Butch continued as a fire fighter even during four years in the Coast Guard (1962 to 1966). He returned to civilian life and served as a fire fighter in Prince William County, Virginia. He was chief of the Waynesboro, Virginia, Fire Department when he was hired as director in Montana. This was a major relocation, and Butch remembers that he first tried to convince his wife to "try it" in Montana for just five years. Twenty-five years later, and with 36 years of marriage, they are still going strong.

Among the challenges in Montana are the special adjustments for fighting fire when it can

be 30 degrees below zero. Butch does not consider this only as a training matter; in addition to his director duties, he remains very active as a volunteer fire fighter, and in two fire departments, no less. He serves as assistant chief with the Gore Hill Fire Rescue Department, and he is an active fire fighter with the Vaughn Volunteer Fire Department, both near Great Falls in Montana.

With so many local activities and duties, it may be asked how does Butch add his duties as a director on the Pro Board. Butch explains that this is one more personal commitment he feels, in this case to step up and serve national fire service interests as important as the Pro Board certification and accreditation system.

State-level fire training in Montana has some unique demands, starting with the climate. Records show it can get as cold as 49 degrees (F) below zero in Great Falls, location of the Montana Fire Services Training School. And the record high for July is 107 degrees. Snowfall is not regularly as high as the record 76 inches, but snow and cold throughout the state obviously have an impact on outside fire training. Other challenges come from the area to be served (Montana is the fourth-largest state is area, with 147,000 square miles) and the very low population density (with only 900,000 people statewide, Montana ranks 44th for population). Butch explains that state training in Montana is mostly outreach.

But Butch reminds us that few states have the scenic beauty of Montana, where mountains in the western third of the state reach more than 12,000 feet. Even the lowest point in the state has an elevation of 1,800 feet.

Butch Weedon says he is honored to serve on the Board of Directors, and he will be a careful and conscientious steward of the reputation and revenues of the Pro Board, which he notes as coming from the fire service he continues to serve in every way possible. Contact Butch at bweedon@montana.edu.

