PENNSYLVANIA FIRE SERVICE VOLUNTARY CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

SURFACE WATER RESCUE AWARENESS, OPERATIONS TECHNICIAN

CANDIDATE HANDBOOK

OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE COMMISSIONER
PENNSYLVANIA STATE FIRE ACADEMY

August 2026

Dear Certification Candidate,

Welcome to the Pennsylvania Fire Service Voluntary Certification Program. This manual provides information to assist you in successfully participating in the certification test. This manual outlines the prerequisites, testing, and application process and provides a study guide reference list. Tests are conducted under the sanction and approval of the Pennsylvania Office of the State Fire Commissioner, with accreditation granted by the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications (National Pro-Board) and the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC)

In accordance with section 7384 of the Emergency Management Services Code (35 Pa. C.S. §§ 7101 *et seq*.), OSFC is entrusted with the duty to implement a statewide firefighter training and certification program. The voluntary certification program in Pennsylvania is available to any Commonwealth resident, regardless of religion, gender, or national origin; any resident may apply for consideration as a test candidate.

Effective March 1, 2026:

- All certification candidates are required to maintain an active Acadis user portal account. (Acadis portal location = OSFC website/ Training and Certification Portal, or click here: ENVISAGE Acadis®)
- All certification candidates are to be registered with the designated test site and rostered for the certification test.

Good luck and thank you for participating in the Pennsylvania Fire Service Voluntary Certification Program.

Application Process

Obtain an application from the Office of the State Fire Commissioner (OSFC) website or an approved test site. You must fill out the form in full and provide all required documentation. The completed application and accompanying documents will be submitted to an approved test site or PA State Fire Academy (PSFA). Your application is then reviewed and accepted or rejected based on compliance and deficiencies (i.e., lack of prerequisites, no signatures, etc.).

The general test process is as follows:

1. A candidate must submit a complete application, including all supporting documents;
2. After the application is approved, the candidate takes the written and, subsequently, the skills tests (NOTE: the skills test cannot be taken before the written test);
3. Upon completing the written and skills tests and reviewing the application for completeness by the test site and PSFA or Delegated Authority, the candidate can be certified for the level tested. If a candidate should not pass any part of the testing process, a retest can be administered and completed within one (1) year of the original test date.

Application Pointers

1. Make sure the application is legible and complete. Applications **MUST** be typed.
2. Application **MUST** have your FEMA Student Identification Number (FEMA-SID).
3. Social Security Number: you must provide the last four (4) digits.
4. Provide your complete name, including suffix (Jr, Sr, III, etc.) **NO** nicknames.
5. Ensure your mailing address includes street, apartment number, city, state, and zip.
6. Make sure all appropriate signatures are obtained and are signed in **all areas, either in Blue or Black ink, or via digital, electronic signatures (MUST be Adobe signature, NOT a Freeform signature).**
    a. *Chief Officers **CAN NOT** sign for themselves where a Chief Officer's signature is required;*
    b. *For this requirement, another Chief Officer **MUST** sign this application section.*
7. Legible copies of all prerequisites must be attached and signed where applicable. **NOTE**: *Copies must include both the front and back of the document where appropriate. (i.e., CPR & Medical cards).*

Ensure your Prerequisite Verification Form (found on the back of the application) is appropriately marked off and signed in **BLUE** or **BLACK** ink or via digital, electronic signatures **(MUST be Adobe signature, NOT a Freeform signature).**

Surface Water Awareness Level Prerequisites:

- PA Fish and Boat – Water Rescue for the First Responder (WRFR)

Surface Water Rescue Operations Level Prerequisites:

- Surface Water Rescue Awareness Level (2021 Edition)
- Rope Rescue Operations training/certification
- PA Fish and Boat – Water Rescue and Emergency Response (WRER)
- PA Fish and Boat – Boater safety course - PA Fish and Boat - Boater Safety Course website
- PA Fish and Boat – Emergency Boat Operations and Rescue (EBOR)
- PA Fish and Boat – Advanced Line System Rescue (ALSR)
- Or comparable training

Surface Water Rescue Technician Level Prerequisites:

- Surface Water Rescue Operations level (2021 Edition)
- Surface Water Rescue Technician Level I (2008 or 2013 edition)
- Or comparable training

REQUIREMENT: NFPA 1006 (2021 Ed) Section 1.3.9 (6) Hazardous Materials Training

Candidates **MUST** be trained or certified at the Hazardous Materials Operations Level in accordance with NFPA 1072 (2017), Chapter 5 (Core Competencies) and Chapter 6 (Mission-Specifics) Section 6.2 (PPE) and Section 6.6 (Product Control), **OR** NFPA 470 (2022) *Hazardous Materials/Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Standard for Responders.* Training standards as outlined in Chapters 6 and Chapter 8, Section 8.2 (PPE) and Section 8.6 (Product Control) or in Certification standards as outlined in Chapter 7 and Chapter 9, Section 9.2 (PPE) and Section 9.6 (Product Control)

Attach a copy of one of the following recognized certificates. Training certificates **MUST** be from the PSFA-approved Jones & Bartlett curriculum OR the PSFA-approved IFSTA curriculum.

Hazardous Materials Operations Level training **OR**

Hazardous Materials Operations Level Annual Refresher training (candidate must have completed an approved operations initial course) **OR**

Hazardous Materials Operations Level Responder National Certification (ProBoard or IFSAC)

NOTE: The certificate (training, refresher training, or certification) **MUST** be current and dated within one (1) year of the certification application and **MUST** meet the requirements of NFPA 1072 (2017) **OR** NFPA 470 (2022).

Awareness, Operations and Technician Prerequisite: **CPR and Emergency Medical Care**

Each candidate **MUST** complete an approved CPR and medical care training course or hold a current EMS certification. A cognitive and skills assessment for both the CPR and First Aid training courses MUST be completed as part of your course, including ALL written exams or optional written exams if applicable.

A list of approved courses that meet the requirements of this section can be found on the OSFC website (Access here: CPR & First Aid Requirements | Commonwealth of Pennsylvania)

Please ensure the following:

- Attach copies of your course certificate or card for CPR and Medical Training. Your certificate or card **MUST** be signed where applicable in order to be valid. Copies **MUST** include front and back where applicable.
- If submitting an eCard or eCertificate, the copy provided **MUST** have an interpretable QR code or number, certificate ID, or authorization number.

Surface Water Rescue Technician Certification Pathway

Awareness

- NFPA 470 or 1072 HAZMAT Operations (state approved course) or HAZMAT Technician

  Training or certification MUST be within one year of the date of application
- CPR and Emergency Medical Care Training
- Water Rescue for the First Responder (PA Fish and Boat)
- Surface Water Awareness Certification

Operations

- NFPA 470 or 1072 HAZMAT Operations (state approved course) or HAZMAT Technician

  Training or certification MUST be within one year of the date of application
- CPR and Emergency Medical Care Training
- Surface Water Awareness Certification
- Water Rescue Emergency Response Course (WRER)
- Basic Boating Course (PA Fish and Boat OR US Coast Guard approved)
- Emergency Boat Operations (PA Fish and Boat EBOR)
- Rope Operation/Advance Line Training OR Certification
- Surface Water Operations Certification

Technician

- NFPA 470 or 1072 HAZMAT Operations (state approved course) or HAZMAT Technician

  Training or certification MUST be within one year of the date of application
- CPR and Emergency Medical Care Training
- Surface Water Operations Certification
- Surface Water Technician Certification

Testing Policy

Written Test: The written test is randomly generated, and the passing score is seventy percent (70%).

Skills Test: Candidates must pass one hundred percent (100%) of the skill stations offered.

Retest Policy

Written Test: If you are unsuccessful, you have two (2) retest attempts and one (1) year to complete the retest. You will need to contact the fire academy or a test site to schedule a retest.

Skills Test: You must pass 100% of the skill stations offered.

- You may retest the same day if you are unsuccessful on three (3) or fewer skill stations. Only one retest per skill station would be permitted on the same day.
- If you are unsuccessful on four (4) or more skill stations, you may NOT retest the same day. Skill retests must be scheduled for a later date and time.
- A total of eight (8) retest attempts are permitted and must be completed in one (1) year to complete the testing process successfully.

Appeals

A candidate may request a review of their performance records by the State Fire Academy within thirty (30) days of receipt of a failure notice. Appeals **MUST** be in writing and in accordance with the policies and procedures of the Certification Program.

Send to: Pennsylvania State Fire Academy
Attn: Certification Program Manager
1150 Riverside Drive
Lewistown, PA 17044

Test Results/Release of Results

The Office of the State Fire Commissioner/PA State Fire Academy notifies candidates of test results in writing via US Postal Service mail. Only pass/fail grades are given.

In accordance with the Federal Education Records and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974, a standard (i.e., law) for the protection of individual education and test records was established; therefore, prior consent from a student/candidate/person must be made before any records or other personally identifiable information can be released to any other person/organization/third-party entity. If a third-party request for a candidate's test result(s) is made, a " Consent to Release Information" form will need to be completed and signed by the candidate to permit the release of results to another person/organization/third-party entity.

Accommodation

The Pennsylvania Fire Service Voluntary Certification Program offers reasonable accommodation for the written certification exams for individuals with documented disabilities. Only written requests for accommodation for certification examinations are reviewed, and each request is reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Requests must be submitted on the Accommodation Request Form. The Pennsylvania Fire Service Voluntary Certification Program provides written notification of its decision to the candidate upon completion of its review and the review by legal counsel of the request for accommodation.

The ***Accommodation Request Form*** is on Page 8 of this manual or available from the Pennsylvania State Fire Academy and test site coordinators. Please contact the Certification Program Manager for further information. The candidate who is requesting accommodation must complete the request form at the time of application submission or as soon as the need for accommodation is recognized. All requests must be made prior to the scheduled date of the examination. Any request for accommodation not submitted at least twenty (20) working days before the scheduled exam will delay the candidate's examination date.

Documentation of a specific disability which would impact a candidate's performance on the written examination must be current (within five (5) years of the date of application). Such documentation should include a signed explanation on letterhead stationery from a professional who is familiar with the applicant's disability or a copy of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) from an educational institution. See the comment below.

The statement must confirm and describe the disability for which the accommodation is requested. The professional must have expertise in the specific disability for which the accommodation is being requested.

Request for Accommodation Form

Name of Candidate: _____
Last Name First Name Middle

Address of Candidate: _____

Telephone Number (area code): _____
(please list a number you can be reached during daylight hours, 8 am – 4 pm)

County of Residence: _____ Email Address: _____

Certification Level Requesting Accommodation for _____ Date of Test: _____

Test Site to which you have submitted your application: _____

I reviewed the NFPA job performance requirements for the level of certification I am seeking, and I am requesting the following accommodation(s) due to my disability-related needs:

☐ I have attached a statement on letterhead stationery from a professional who is familiar with my disability. I understand that the professional must have expertise in the specific disability for which I am seeking an accommodation for, and the statement must confirm and describe the disability for which the accommodation is requested. The statement is signed by the professional.

☐ I am submitting a copy of an IEP (Individual Education Plan) which I have obtained from my educational institution.

_____
Signature of the individual completing this form Date

_____
Printed or type name of the individual completing this form

Return this form to Pennsylvania State Fire Academy

Attn: Certification Program Manager
1150 Riverside Drive
Lewistown, PA 17044
(717) 247-3743

Safety Policy

A candidate should meet the requirements of *NFPA 1580 (2025) Standard for Emergency Responder Occupational Health and Wellness* prior to participating in any physical test to ensure their ability to perform the required tasks safely.

For the safety and protection of all participants, all equipment, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) used in a test must meet the NFPA standard at the time of manufacturing. PPE will be inspected prior to use in a test.

The facial hair policy states candidates with facial hair that interferes with the operation or use of a Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) will not be permitted to participate in a test that requires an SCBA.

No show policy

If a candidate is accepted for testing and fails to show up for the test without an acceptable reason, the test site has the right to enforce its no-show policy, which could include but is not limited to suspension from testing for an identified period of time or financial penalties.

Professional Testing Integrity and Dishonesty

Dishonesty in the professional test environment includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarizing, facilitating acts of testing dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, or submitting the work of another person. Any instance(s) of testing dishonesty constitutes the need for disciplinary or legal actions. All certification candidates shall act with personal integrity, respect others' rights and property, and help maintain a professional environment where all can succeed.

Test Site Coordinators, Assistant Coordinators, Test Proctors, Evaluators, and Instructors should take reasonable steps to anticipate and deter acts of dishonesty, reinforce integrity, and support appropriate behavior to protect the rights and trust of honest candidates. At the beginning of each test process, it is the responsibility of those to provide candidates with the "Testing Integrity and Dishonesty" policy and clarify questions that may arise.

Falsification of Documents

Any individual found to have forged, altered, or falsified documentation for the purpose of certification testing will be indefinitely suspended from participating in any certification exam within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Further action may be taken in accordance with the Pennsylvania Crimes Code 18 Pa C.S. 4904, relating to unsworn falsifications.

Cheating on Test

All candidates are expected to work entirely on their own while taking any exam. Violations of test integrity consist of any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids unless provided by the test proctor for the purpose of a specific test, or any persons, papers, or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance

Document Integrity

Certification candidates are expected to complete any and all work individually. A source reference must be given for any material obtained from other sources such as plot plans, web maps, etc. All essay answers must be the candidate's own work.

Study Reference List

The following is a list of text that may be reference in preparation for testing.

1. National Fire Protection Association NFPA 1006 (2021 Ed) Standard for Technical Rescue Personnel Professional Qualifications;
2. Jones and Bartlett Water Rescue
3. PA Fish and Boat Student Manuals
   a. Water Rescue for the First Responder (WRFR)
   b. Water Rescue Emergency Response (WRER)
   c. Emergency Boat Operations (EBOR)
   d. Advanced Lines (ALSR)
4. Skill Sheets can be found under "Skills we're looking for"

Additional Information

1. The application should be to the test site at least two (2) weeks prior to the test date
2. Please contact the test site of your choice to receive information about fees for testing
3. Photo ID is required at the time of the written and skills testing
4. Bring all appropriate PPE for the completion of all possible skill stations
5. Dress appropriately, and bring extra dry clothes
6. Bring food and beverages with you and stay hydrated.

Certification applications, skill sheets, and the test schedule and site contact information can be found at Firefighter Certifications | Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. A page will open with information about the certification program and process. Scroll on the page to find the links to the certification applications, skill sheets, test schedule, and test site contact information.

If you have additional questions or concerns about the test process, please get in touch with the test site coordinator at the site where you applied to be tested or contact the PA State Fire Academy Certification Program Staff.

Firefighter Code of Ethics

I understand that I have the responsibility to conduct myself in a manner that reflects proper ethical behavior and integrity. In so doing, I will help foster a continuing positive public perception of the fire service. Therefore, I pledge the following…

- Always conduct myself, on and off duty, in a manner that reflects positively on myself, my department, and the fire service in general.
- Accept responsibility for my actions and for the consequences of my actions.
- Support the concept of fairness and the value of diverse thoughts and opinions.
- Avoid situations that would adversely affect the credibility or public perception of the fire service profession.
- Be truthful and honest at all times and report instances of cheating or others' dishonest acts that compromise the integrity of the fire service.
- Conduct my personal affairs in a manner that does not improperly influence the performance of my duties, or bring discredit to my organization.
- Be respectful and conscious of each member's safety and welfare.
- Recognize that I serve in a position of public trust that requires stewardship in the honest and efficient use of publicly owned resources, including uniforms, facilities, vehicle, and equipment and that these are protected from misuse and theft.
- Exercise professionalism, competence, respect and loyalty in the performance of my duties and use information, confidential or otherwise, gained by virtue of my position, only to benefit those I am entrusted to serve.
- Avoid financial investments, outside employment, outside business interests or activities that conflict with or are enhanced by my official position or have the potential to create the perception of impropriety.
- Never propose or accept personal rewards, special privileges, benefits, advancement, honors of gifts that may create a conflict of interest, or the appearance thereof.
- Never engage in activities involving alcohol or other substance use or abuse that can impair my mental state or the performance of my duties and compromise safety.
- Never discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, creed, age, marital status, national origin, ancestry, gender, sexual preference, medical condition, or handicap.
- Never harass, intimidate or threaten fellow members of the service or the public and stop or report the actions of other firefighters who engage in such behaviors.
- Responsibly use social networking, electronic communications, or other media technology opportunities in a manner that does not discredit, dishonor, or embarrass my organization, the fire service, and the public. I also understand that failure to resolve or report inappropriate use of this media equates to condoning this behavior.

Developed by the National Society of Executive Fire Officers