

CERTIFICATION OF THE OHS PROFESSIONAL IN AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

Since it was introduced in 1969, the Certified Safety Professional designation has achieved major impacts on professional safety practice in the United States. In this session we will review certification for safety professionals, explore how it works, discuss its value, establish an understanding of certification quality and explain availability in Australia.

THE BOARD OF CERTIFIED SAFETY PROFESSIONALS

The Board of Certified Safety Professionals (BCSP; www.bcsp.org) began in 1969 as an independent, not-for-profit corporation responsible for establishing and operating certification for safety professionals. BCSP grew out of a study by the American Society of Safety Engineers that identified a need for such a certification program.

BCSP is not a membership organization and does not operate conferences, training, continuing education, publications and other services typical of professional membership organizations. The only BCSP members are thirteen Directors who may serve two, three-year terms. One director is a public director who has no involvement with the safety profession. Six are elected from the safety profession at large. The other six are elected from a pool of candidates nominated by six us safety-related membership organizations. These organizations include the American Society of Safety Engineers, the American Industrial Hygiene Association, the System Safety Society, the Society of Fire Protection Engineers, the National Safety Council and the Institute of Industrial Engineers. Their only role with BCSP is nominating individuals to serve on the BCSP Board.

Funds for BCSP operations come from fees associated with the certification process, not from any outside sources. The only certification offered by BCSP itself is the Certified Safety Professional certification.

In order to demonstrate to the profession, employers, government organizations and the public that BCSP and its CSP represent high quality, BCSP has pursued the highest standards available to certification bodies. Within the U.S., BCSP has met independent accreditations for certifications through the National Commission for Certifying Agencies and the Council of Engineering and Scientific Specialty Boards, both U.S. organizations. In addition, BCSP achieved recognition for compliance with certification programs established by the federal agency called the National Skill Standards Board, which is now disbanded. Most recently, BCSP achieved accreditation under the new ISO/IEC 17024 covering certification of persons.

While the CSP process is a voluntary process, numerous employers have incorporated the

CSP into position standards, especially for senior safety professionals. A number of federal, state and local government agencies have incorporated the CSP into laws, regulations, standards and contracts.

The mission of BCSP is simple, but execution is complex. BCSP sets standards for professional safety practice, evaluates people against those standards and awards certification to those who achieve and continue to comply with those standards.

In addition, BCSP has a judicial function. It has a Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct and enforces that through its disciplinary procedures. It protects its certification from unauthorized use and infringement of its intellectual property value.

BCSP also plays an important role in advancing the safety profession and professionalism. The BCSP web site contains the most comprehensive database of U.S. academic programs in the broad field of safety, health, environment and related areas of practice. It publishes career information and distributes it at no charge to schools and others. Its *Career Guide to the Safety Profession* was recently republished in China. BCSP promotes the value of safety professionalism and the importance of benchmarking professional competency through certification.

Through a separate organization called the Council on Certification of Health, Environmental and Safety Technologists (CCHES; www.cchest.org), BCSP also operates certifications for paraprofessionals in safety and health. In addition, CCHES has a certification for supervisors and managers who are responsible for safety of their work groups as part of their overall job duties.

HOW CERTIFICATION WORKS - CONSIDER THE CSP

Governments license practitioners in some professions. Examples are medicine, nursing, barbers and beauticians, attorneys, and others. Licensure authorizes someone to practice. The primary purpose of licensing is to protect the public from harm, particularly in those fields where professionals provide services directly to members of the public.

In most countries, safety professionals, along with many other professionals, are not licensed. As a result, certification has emerged as a peer-operated process by which people can demonstrate competency in a field of practice. It has become a valuable tool that assists with career change. The certification process itself is very similar to licensing. However, it is a voluntary process and does not limit who can practice, unless a third party employer, contracting organization or government agency requires the certification for certain jobs or services.

Standards for certification applicants typically include educational or training requirements, work experience in the field and demonstrated knowledge by examination. Continuing professional development is usually required to retain the certification. Most certification boards are not-for-profit corporations, governed by members of the profession being certified. Most certification boards operate from fees associated with the certification process and have no other outside income.

Certification boards have a judicial role and may become involved in disciplinary action against those who falsify application information, do not comply with the code of ethics and

professional practice, or who are convicted of crimes in general or related to practice. The penalties upon conviction in a discipline case may vary from reprimand to suspension or revocation of certification. This judicial responsibility operates within the certification organization and rarely relies on the courts.

Consider the Certified Safety Professional (CSP) program as an example. It requires applicants to present a bachelor's degree in any field or an associate degree in safety and health as the minimum educational requirement. While people enter safety practice from many different backgrounds, those seeking the CSP must meet this educational standard. Those holding a quality degree in safety get the maximum credit in the application review.

Applicants for the CSP must also present acceptable safety experience at a professional level, which involves responsible charge for safety work and making recommendations to management. The amount varies with the degree field of study. Those with a bachelor's degree in safety from a quality academic program must present a minimum of four years of professional safety experience. Applicants with other degrees must present as much as seven years of professional safety experience, depending on the field of study for their degree.

All candidates for the CSP must pass one examination and most must pass two examinations. A waiver of the first of the two examinations leading to the CSP typically involves having been examined through other quality certifications in the broad safety field.

The contents of the examinations are derived from studies of safety professionals in practice. Some call this type of study a job analysis or role delineation study. The study must be updated about every five years to ensure that the current examination covers current professional practice. The study ensures that the examinations cover what people actually do in practice. Typically, the first phase of a job analysis study involves a panel of practitioners led by a facilitator who in about three days define the functions, tasks, knowledge and skills of practice. The second phase involves having practitioners complete a written survey. They must rate the functions and tasks with regard to how much time they spend on each in their own practice, how important each is and how critical each is in protecting the public. The end result of the study is an outline of practice. The outline is called an examination blueprint. However, the outline also can be used to define training or educational requirements for practice.

The knowledge defined in the blueprint forms the basis for examination questions. Question development requires a long series of quality control steps to ensure that they perform well on an examination. All questions must have a published authority for the correct answer, just one of many quality steps. Most questions are drafted by people in practice.

An additional examination development step is a process to establish the passing score or cut score. That is the standard that all test takers must meet. The process focuses on the difficulty of the items for those who are just good enough to meet the educational and experience qualifications, not people who have many years of experience or advanced study in the field.

Using the CSP as an example, the most recent job analysis defines organizes professional safety practice into four major job functions, 24 tasks, 192 knowledge statements and 147 skill statements. The survey results from 1,500 safety professionals provides a basis for calculating the portion of the examination that should be devoted to each function and task.

The distributions are part of the examination blueprint.

For recertification, BCSP allows certificate holders to gain points toward each five-year recertification cycle through ten categories of activities. People can always meet recertification by passing the second examination, but most use continuing education and conferences and other activities to achieve the required points.

VALUE OF CERTIFICATION

Certification adds value to the profession and those in it in a variety of ways. At the personal level, most people who achieve certification in a field take personal pride in having achieved a standard established by peers. There is a great deal of self image that results.

A quality certification does what it is suppose to and ensures that those achieving the certification have met the competency standard for the field. In studies conducted by BCSP, nearly two-thirds of all certificants reported that the process “made me learn the subject matter” for the safety field.

There is value also for the safety profession and among peers. Some organizations use certification for certain membership status or honor those who have achieved certification. The CSP has grown in pay value since it began and currently those holding the CSP in the US earn on average approximately \$20,000 (US) more each year than those with no certification.

Employers benefit as well. Employers know that education and experience of certificate holders has been evaluated as part of the certification process. They also have assurance that certified practitioners possess the knowledge required for practice. Many employers use certification as a standard for certain positions (usually more senior positions) or to qualify for certain kinds of responsibilities or promotions. Many recognize certification with monetary rewards, such as bonus pay or higher pay grades.

For those performing consulting work or operating consulting companies, certification may be a requirement for or offer an edge when competing for contracts or qualifying for work.

Should there be a need to change employers, certification often assists in lateral mobility. It provides an independently assessed qualification in addition to education and experience usually named in job advertisements. Internationally, professional credentials, including certifications, are growing in importance as well. International transportability of credentials is growing through quality certifications.

Although most safety professionals do not provide services directly to the public, those holding quality certifications are more likely to gain confidence by the public. A profession with a quality certification gains credibility with the public, government agencies and employers.

QUALITY STANDARDS FOR CERTIFICATIONS

Quality is critical in the certification field. Because it is a volunteer process, anyone can start a certification and create the image that the process used to award certification is reliable. In the last few years, third-party, independent accreditation of certification programs provides a

method to ensure that a certification incorporates quality in all aspects of its business and is free of self-serving conflicts of interest. Evaluation of certifications by independent reviewers provides a means for a certification to demonstrate its quality for the profession, employers, government agencies and the public. The most notable international standard is ISO/IEC 17024, which covers certification of persons. Over 85 countries have adopted this standard. In the United States, other organizations provided independent evaluations long before ISO/IEC 17024 was launched about four years ago.

Quality standards for certifications cover governance, financial practices, fairness to candidates, non-discrimination, quality in examinations, recertification requirements, independence, and other factors.

In governance, the standards address nominating and election processes to assure that a certification program is not a “good-old-boys” activity that limits who can achieve it. The standards require public participation in the governance by someone not involved in the profession.

Financial standards require disclosure of verified or audited financial records and consider whether the operation is sufficiently sound financially to continue existing. The standards ensure that the certification program is not operated for the benefit of an individual or a few individuals.

Standards ensure independence. The seeking to avoid undue influence from outside interests. They ensure that inappropriate requirements, such as membership in an organization, are not requirements to achieve or retain the certification. They ensure that organizations certifying competence are independent of training for the certification.

Accreditation standards cover details about examinations and testing to ensure that all candidates have a fair and equal chance of passing an examination, regardless of the examination format. They require that all candidates be examined. They address content validity, which means that examinations cover knowledge relevant to practice and are based on solid job analysis studies. Examination standards require that procedures for setting passing scores, scoring of examinations, and certification decisions are consistent, reliable, and fair. They ensure that the examination scores of candidates do not impact other candidates’ ability to pass. They cover security practices during development of questions, assembly of examinations and examination administration and scoring.

The standards require appropriate handling of appeals of certification decisions. They require certification programs to have policy relating to non-discrimination on a variety of candidate characteristics.

Accrediting standards address confidentiality of candidate and certificant data, including both personal and examination data and certification results.

All accrediting groups require periodic recertification of certificants. While retaking and passing examinations is the preferred method, most allow a variety of continuing professional development activities to stay current with practice.

Accreditation standards cover legal considerations that may extend to protection of certification marks, protection from unauthorized use of the certification, and implementation and enforcement of a code of conduct.

The ISO/IEC 17024 standards are particularly strong on management systems. While this standard does not require compliance with ISO 9000, it carries a significant emphasis on similar management system practices to ensure that the certifying body has organized and operates its programs effectively.

Overall, a key to quality in certification is compliance with recognized, independent standards and third-party evaluation of a certification programs processes and practices.

BRINGING CERTIFICATION TO AUSTRALIA

A few months ago, the Board of Certified Safety Professionals responded to requests from Australian safety and health professional organizations and agreed to find a way to bring the highly recognized Certified Safety Professional program to Australia. BCSP outlined a three phase process for accomplishing this. The process was introduced in November 2005 to safety and health leaders through presentations in Melbourne and Fremantle.

The first of the three phases is simply offering the CSP program as it now exists. For many years, BCSP has made its examination available nearly anywhere in the world. Applicants must meet the current requirements to achieve and retain the CSP. That continues, but with increased support and visibility from Australian safety and health organizations.

The second phase involves steps to identify whether adjustments in the certification process and examinations may be required for Australian professional safety practice and to begin making those changes. To foster those activities, BCSP has established an Advisory Council with representatives from the Safety Institute of Australian and other Australian safety and health organizations. Its role is to help guide implementation of certification in Australia and to assist BCSP in certification quality matters as they apply in Australia. For example, the Advisory Council is helping BCSP to consider how its educational standards derived from the US educational system may need to be adjusted to fit the Australian educational system. The Advisory Council will shortly be assisting with a “transportability study” that explores whether the job analysis results that forms the foundation for current CSP examinations fit Australian practice. The Advisory Council will assist in potential adjusting of language in the current examinations and making modifications related to units of measure and similar matters. It will assist in making information about certification and careers in safety available throughout Australia.

In the third phase, members of the safety profession in Australia will participate in a comprehensive job analysis study that BCSP has scheduled to begin in 2007. The Advisory Council will be a key in assisting with the job analysis and validation survey for the CSP. The study will include both US and Australian practice. There are also emerging opportunities in phase three that will lead to participating in strategies among safety organizations in many parts of the world to potentially achieve transportability of credentials for safety professionals across the globe.

The Advisory Council will also assist in exploring whether the paraprofessional supervisory certifications offered by CCHEST are suitable for and of value in Australia.

This step-by-step process will provide a measure approach to accelerate the availability of quality certifications for safety practitioners in Australia. Establishing a quality certification

that meets accreditation standards is an expensive and difficult process. A partnership between BCSP and Australian safety professionals is essential to achieving this goal. BCSP is delighted to be able to respond to the request and to collaborate with the Safety Institute of Australia and other safety and professional organizations in Australia. The approach with Australian safety professionals is a pilot project that will help BCSP respond to requests for assistance and participation in certification from several other countries.

SUMMARY

Quality certification has a strong history in the safety profession in the US. Quality certification has helped enhance the safety profession and those practicing in it. Validating the quality through third party accreditation provides assurance of the value of the certification to safety professionals, employers, government agencies, the public and others. BCSP looks forward to assisting the safety profession in Australia to benefit from certification and to participating with Australian safety professionals in this valuable, voluntary process that enhances the profession.