

SECTION 6

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES UNDER NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION SYSTEMS / NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION

6-1 Written and Skills Examination Procedures

- 6-1.1 The Virginia Fire Services Board is the accrediting authority within VDFP. It is the intent of the Board that all examinations and practical tests be administered upon the completion of every school or as soon as possible after the completion of a school. All examinations and tests are considered confidential and will not be shown to any person (including instructors) except the VDFP staff, the instructor authorized to administer a particular examination, and the individuals taking the examinations.
- 6-1.2 All written examinations will be graded at VDFP Division Offices, unless approved in advance by the Branch Chief of Operations and Training of VDFP or VDFP Division Chief. All test results are confidential and will only be released to the individual's chief or training officer, except if the individual has previously indicated otherwise on the **Student Registration/Personal Data** "green form".
- 6-1.3 When an individual has met all the prerequisites that must be met for certification testing, he/she may be tested. Only those individuals who have completed all of the following prerequisites for a given level will be tested:
- 6-1.3.1 100% attendance is required for all certification courses. If a course module is missed, the student may make-up the required module by using the **Training Validation Form** signed by an approved Fire Instructor or by attending the course module at a later date.
 - 6-1.3.2 A written examination will be given to those students who wish to be certified when the prerequisites are met for any given level. A grade of 70% correct or better must be achieved. All written examinations required for police and summons powers require a passing score of 85% correct or better. The skill evaluation will be graded as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Fire Marshall Academy may vary. Check FMA section for more information.
 - 6-1.3.3 Any fire department/brigade which has twelve (12) or more individuals eligible to take the written examination may contact the appropriate VDFP Division Chief who will make arrangements to have the written examination administered at a mutually agreed time and location.

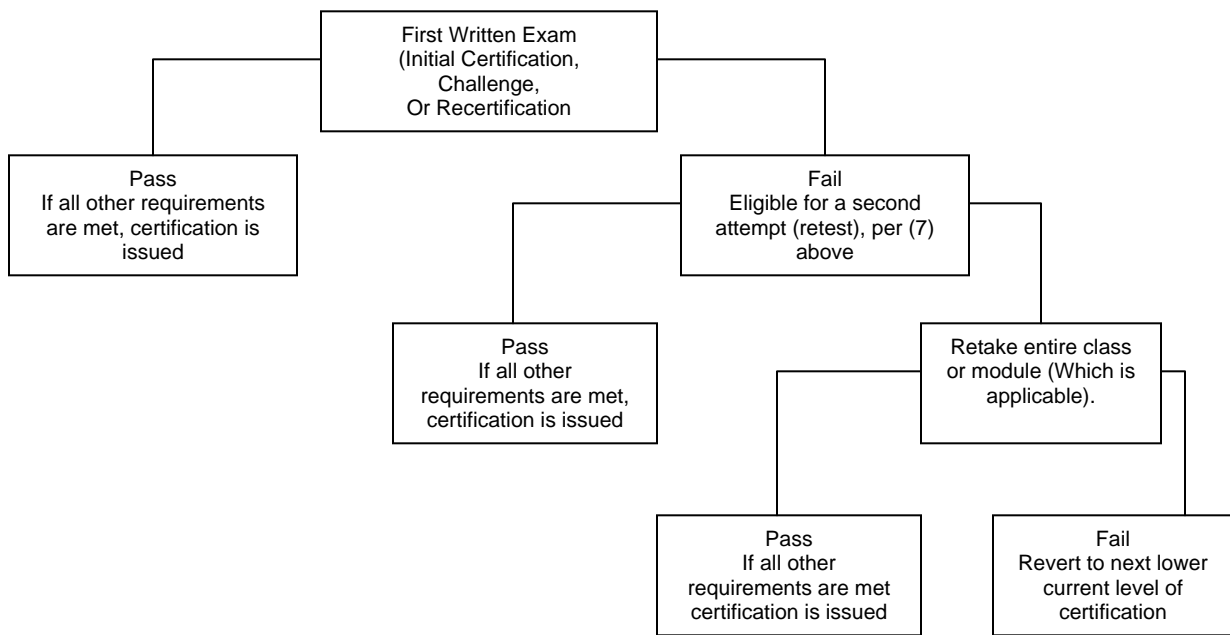
6-1.3.4 Request for Written and Skill Testing and the Fire Fighter Application and Certification ("green forms") will be available from the instructor at the beginning of any VDFP approved training schools or from any VDFP Division Office.

6-1.3.5 Students may request to be administered an oral examination in lieu of a written examination for all subjects, except Fire Inspector I, II, & III, Fire Investigator II & III, Adjunct Instructor, Hazardous Materials First Responder Awareness, and Hazardous Materials First Responder Operations. The instructor, to ensure equality in testing, must not use any special voice inflexion or offer any explanation of the question to the student. The student must personally complete the answer sheet.

6-1.3.6 If a student fails to achieve a passing grade at the completion of the course, the student may retest only after the results of the first written tests have been verified.

6-1.3.7 If the student fails the written examination on the initial attempt, the student must wait ten (10) days before he/she can retest. The retest must be completed within ninety (90) days of the failure notification. If the student fails to retest within the allotted time, the student will have to retake the entire course.

6-1.3.8 Students taking written examinations, for initial certification, recertification, or challenge, may take the written test no more than twice. If the student fails the written exam on the second attempt they will be required to retake the entire class or module in question. The flow chart below further details the process:



6-1.3.9 If the student so desires, said student candidate, may be given the Firefighter test (only in Firefighter level I & II) a third and final time with the approval of the VDFP Division Chief.

6-2 Procedure is as follows;

6-2.1 It shall be at the discretion of the VDFP Division Chief to grant a student one additional testing as listed above if the student candidate completes thirty (30) hours of additional documented course study in the course in question.

6-2.2 The students name must be listed on the approved course Roll Call sheet, and submitted to the VDFP Division Chief for review prior to granting the additional test. The student must attend all modules in the thirty (30) hour time frame and document which courses he/she attended to match the Roll Call Sheet. It will be the responsibility of the student to maintain these records, so that they may be tested. Once this procedure has been completed he/she may sit for testing at the next approved testing site.

6-2.3 Skills testing will follow the same path as written testing for those few classes that still require skill tests. Skills testing for TTT's, HTR Specialists, and Fire Attack Teams may vary at the discretion of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs.

6-3 Test Procedures Programs for Independent Department/Brigade Training Programs

6.3.1 Same as section 6-1

6-4 Reciprocity/Challenge Test Procedures

6-4.1 Any person who moves to Virginia and can provide a current certificate(s) of training from a state that is recognized by the National Professional Qualifications Board or similarly nationally recognized organization will be recognized at that level by VDFP without having to take the Virginia examinations. If a certificate is more than five years old, regardless if it was issued by another state that is recognized by the National Professional Qualifications Board, it will be considered as having expired and the person will be required to commence training again at the lowest level for that professional skill.

6-4.2 Every individual within the Commonwealth is eligible to be tested or demonstrate their competency for any professional skill/level and be certified for that skill and level provided that they can offer evidence of equivalent type training. Documentation of such training must be attached to a Personal Data Form and forwarded to the appropriate VDFP Division Chief. This procedure will be

followed by all individuals who wish to challenge for testing, no matter where they acquired their training. Individuals must satisfy all prerequisites of the level for which they are requesting to challenge. If the training is determined to be equal to or exceed the training standards established by the Virginia Fire Services Board, that individual will be permitted to take the written and skills (practical) tests as appropriate. A passing score of 70% correct or better is required on all written tests (except for those tests for police and summons powers) and all phases of skills tests must be satisfactory. Individuals interested in being tested should contact the VDFP Division Chief for upcoming testing dates.

6-4.3 At the implementation of NFPA's professional qualifications standards, VDFP offered firefighters within the Commonwealth an opportunity to challenge any professional skill/level for which they were qualified, based upon their position, experience, documented training, and position within their fire department/brigade. Those that passed the examinations were "grandfathered" and were awarded certificates that reflected their level of professional qualifications. That opportunity expired June 30, 1980.

6-5 Recertification Guidelines

6-5.1 The Virginia Fire Services Board is the accrediting authority within VDFP. As such, the Virginia Fire Services Board has abolished recertification for all VDFP training programs with the exception of Inspector and Investigator.

6-5.2 All persons currently certified as of December 25, 1998 (with the exception of Inspectors and Investigators maintaining certification under Title 27) are not required to participate in any VDFP recertification or Continuing Education program. Persons whose certifications expired on or before December 31, 1997 will not be considered current. Inspectors maintaining summons powers or summons power potential will still need to maintain 16 hours of recertification every two years. Investigators maintaining police powers or police powers potential will still need to maintain 40 hours of recertification training every two years. Those certified as Inspectors or Investigators who are not maintaining their potential powers under Title 27 will remain certified providing their certification did not expire on or before December 31, 1997. Adjunct Instructors, acting on behalf of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs will be required to meet standards established by the Department.

6-5.3 In the event a person is entering the VDFP system from another agency that participates with the National Board on Professional Qualifications (NPQS) or the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC), the date(s) of the NPQS or IF SAC must match those in this procedure for reciprocity.

6-5.4 The Virginia Department of Fire Programs will offer, to any locality wishing to adopt, a recertification plan for use regarding fire training.

6-6 Grading Written Tests

6-6.1 In order that the test is properly evaluated, a list of persons who take the test at each location with their grades and each level attempted will be forwarded to VDFP's central office. Every attempt will be made by VDFP to ensure that every test is administered equitably.

6-6.2 All written tests will be graded and evaluated at a VDFP office. In order to maintain test security, no written tests will be graded in the field without the prior approval of the Branch Chief of Operations and Training of VDFP or VDFP Division Chief. This includes all instructor and VDFP staff unless authorized by the Branch Chief of Operations and Training. A question analysis may be done on each test prior to releasing any grades. This analysis will include the number of students passing or failing the test and the correct and incorrect answers given on each question. The Branch Chief of Operations and Training of VDFP will review the results of this analysis and make adjustments, if required, to the test scores prior to their release.

6-7 Procedures for Notification of Grades

6-7.1 In November of 1998, the Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) initiated measures to more effectively control access to fire training records and information. These efforts were undertaken to ensure compliance with the federal Privacy Act of 1974, the Freedom of Information Act, the Virginia Privacy Protection Act of 1976 and to guard against the misuse and inadvertent disclosure of personal information maintained within a student's file.

6-7.2 VDFP will not release any personal information pertaining to a student's fire training records without that student's expressed written and signed permission. Such personal information includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- a. Address and telephone number(s).
- b. Social Security number.
- c. Information that can be released without the student's permission will be limited in scope and consist of the following:
 1. Verification of class attendance, and
 2. Date(s) of the class or program in question.

6-7.3 Final outcome of course participation (grades; whether the student earned a certificate). Only those individuals authorized to receive a student's transcript and/or training certificate as noted by the student on the testing form shall be the recipient(s) of such data.

- 6- 7.4 VDFP realizes that students require occasional access to their personal records; however, because VDFP staff cannot verify a caller's identity over the telephone, a signed, written request by the inquiring party along with a signed, written permission statement by the student is necessary for the release of such information.
- 6- 7.5 To facilitate a smooth transition to this new policy and allow Virginia's fire services students the opportunity to effectively communicate their wishes to their appropriate VDFP Division Office, students are encouraged to submit a Virginia Fire Training Records and Information Release Form or indicate their clear intentions in writing with an authorizing signature.
- 6- 7.6 This document will allow VDFP students to expressly permit or prohibit the disclosure of any or all requested material maintained within their files. In addition, this release form will allow individuals to pre-approve the availability of records and certifications to any specified agency in advance of that agency's request. Such an option may benefit the student who has applied for employment with a paid department and requires that a copy of his/her training records be sent to that agency. This form is to be submitted to the student's local VDFP Division Office.
- 6-7.7 When submitting a release form, please verify that all the blanks have been completed; the necessary boxes have been checked; and an authorizing signature accompanies the document. Incomplete forms will not be processed.
- 6- 7.8 In the event a student requires the disclosure of training records to a fire services agency or other third party and a release form is not available, the student should submit a written and signed request via facsimile or mail to the correct VDFP Division Office.

6-8 Certificates Issued by the Virginia Department of Fire Programs

- 6-8.1 The Virginia Fire Services Board is the accrediting authority within the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. As such certificates prepared by VDFP are issued under its auspices. There are four types of certificates which are issued:
1. The first type of certificate is for successfully performing the minimum standards required of a professional skill as established by NFPA professional qualifications standards. These standards are usually conducted over a lengthy period of time. This certificate recognizes a candidate's performance only.
 2. The second type of certificate is for successfully demonstrating the skills (a written or practical test must be administered) required for the course

that is authorized by either the National Fire Academy or the Virginia Fire Services Board. This certificate recognizes a candidate's performance only.

3. The third type of certificate is for attending a class or symposium for which no test is administered. This is an attendance certificate and does not reflect any learned skills.
4. The fourth type of certificate is exclusively for instructors, which certifies those types of courses for which they are authorized to teach.

6-9 **Appeal Procedures for Individuals Who Fail Certification**

6-9.1 Individuals who fail certification or have failed re-testing as listed in Section 6-1, are entitled to an appeals process as follows. First step is the individual should contact the appropriate VDFP Division Chief who will review the facts and provide a response in writing to the individual within 30 days. If necessary the individual has the option of then appealing the VDFP Division Chief's decision to the Branch Chief of Operations and Training. The Branch Chief of Operations and Training will review the facts and provide a response in writing to the individual within 30 days. If necessary, the individual has the option of appealing the Branch Chief of Operations and Training's decision to an Appeals Panel consisting of 3 members of the Virginia Fire Services Board, one member to be appointed by the individual, one member to be appointed by the Chairman of the Board and one member to be appointed by the Executive Director of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. The appeal to the Panel must be in writing and within 90 days of the original test date.

6-9.2 To appeal at any step, an individual must state in writing why he/she believes that the test was administered improperly, or that there was an inequity in the evaluation of the test. It is the responsibility of the individual to provide substantial evidence to support the appeals. If a personal appearance before the Appeals Panel is requested, it will be arranged by the Branch Chief of Operations and Training of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. The individual may provide evidence (to include any witnesses) to the Appeals Panel to support his/her appeals petition. The Appeals Panel will deliberate, based upon evidence provided, and must render at least a 2/3 vote of the Appeals Panel members to override a test grade. Individuals are granted only one appeal per test level. The decision of the panel is final.