



Frequently asked questions about
the Virginia SFMO Pyrotechnician
certification program.



Beginning March 1, 2011 the Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC) requires “any person supervising or engaged in the design, setup or conducting of any fireworks display, either inside a building or outdoors” to be certified by the State Fire Marshal’s Office (SFMO) as a “Pyrotechnician”.

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1. What is a “Pyrotechnician”?

The SFPC has established two categories of certified Pyrotechnician. One is “**Pyrotechnician, aerial**” and the other is “**Pyrotechnician, proximate**”.

Pyrotechnician, aerial is “a person supervising or engaged in the design, setup or conducting of a outdoor aerial fireworks display performed in accordance with the regulations as set forth in this code [SFPC] and NFPA 1123, a referenced standard for fireworks displays.”

Pyrotechnician, proximate is “a person supervising or engaged in the design, setup or conducting of a fireworks display, either inside a building or outdoors, performed in accordance with the regulations as set forth in this code [SFPC] and NFPA 1126, a referenced standard for the use of pyrotechnics before a proximate audience.”

2. What are the basic steps for obtaining certification as a Pyrotechnician?

The major steps for obtaining SFMO certification as a Pyrotechnician are:

- A. First, register and successfully complete an approved examination for the category of Pyrotechnician wanted.
- B. Obtain an application from the SFMO for certification as a Pyrotechnician.
- C. Attach to the SFMO application evidence of having successfully completing an acceptable or approved written examination for the pyrotechnician category being applied for.
- D. Attach to the SFMO application a completed fingerprint card that is supplied by the SFMO for obtaining the required criminal history records check.
- E. List on the SFMO application information showing the applicant has sufficient qualifying experience.
- F. Enclose the required certification fee.

3. What does “sufficient qualifying experience” mean? What is it?

The SFMO certification program is intended to be a minimum knowledge and competency program, not a proficiency program. The required experience component expressed in the Statewide Fire Prevention Code can be likened to the experience component when obtaining one’s driver’s license and the minimum amount of under-the-wheel time required in getting that license. For the pyrotechnician certification the hard numbers to be dealt with is attesting to having a role in a fireworks display on at least 6 occasions in the preceding 24 months from the date of application. Those 6 shows are not required to be of any certain level, sophistication, duration, paid or unpaid, public or private, nor are these shows confined to using only *professional* grade fireworks. (Because of the Virginia definition of fireworks, the firecrackers, bottle rockets, roman candles and other *high end consumer fireworks* purchased in other states are illegal to use in Virginia unless a permit has been secured for their use.)

The application states the experience component is subject to audit and verification. Only basic information will be needed such as the date, location, role, contact information for the sponsor, and the contact information of the authority having jurisdiction. (Even training sessions can be acceptable for experience.) This is to ensure that regardless of the size, scope, duration, whether public or private, the locality has or had knowledge about it and can help attest that it is a qualifying fireworks display for satisfying the experience component.

4. How do I get an application for Pyrotechnician certification? Is it available on the internet or as a download?

Applications must be obtained from the SFMO by calling 804-371-0220 or through email at statefiremarshal@vdfp.virginia.gov. Provide a name and mailing address to which the applications can be mailed along with how many applications are needed.

The applications are not available via internet or email, they must be mailed. The principal reason being, the fingerprint cards are uniquely coded to this office. Because of that, they do not lend themselves easily to download or as email attachments.

It is not advisable to hoard or hold blank fingerprint cards and applications for possible future use due to changes that can be made the forms and cards without notice. If outdated applications and/or fingerprint cards are used, it will only serve to significantly delay the process of getting certified.

5. What should I do first? Should I get an SFMO Pyrotechnician application first or take an exam first?

While you can ask for and receive an SFMO Pyrotechnician application at any time, it is advisable to register for an exam first. You should not submit the application without having the examination results attached to it. Therefore, during the intervening time between when you registered for the exam and the date for taking the examination, you may call for and receive the SFMO Pyrotechnician application. In this manner you can complete the application as much as possible, and then simply attach a copy of the exam results when you receive them and submit the complete application package to the SFMO. To submit a less than complete application package serves only to delay the processing of an application or having it denied entirely.

6. What exam(s) is/are currently acceptable or approved?

A. The Community College Workforce Alliance (CCWA).

The CCWA is administering pyrotechnician examinations at various location in-state and out of state. A Candidate Information Bulletin (CIB) is available for viewing or printing through the SFMO web page. (http://www.vafire.com/state_fire_marshal/fireworks.htm) The CIB, found under “Publications”, will provide basic information on registering and paying the exam fee.

7. How do I register for an exam?

As the CCWA bulletin describes, the first step towards scheduling your exam is to go to <http://www.exampay.com/pyrotechnicsva> After clicking on the button titled “Schedule your exam” you will be taken to a CCWA page that lists the various dates and locations available. Upon selecting the desired date and location you will need to supply basic information such as which exam you wish to take (aerial or proximate), your name, address, email address and phone number.

After clicking on the “Submit” button you will be taken to a screen that will list the information you previously provided and if correct (verified), you will need to click on the “Pay now” button and then follow the steps provided for paying the exam fee. The payment process requires the use of a credit/debit card.

If you successfully complete the registration and payment process, you will have the opportunity to print a receipt from the screen and you will automatically receive an email receipt which must be presented at the test site.

8. How much is the cost of each exam and what is the basis for the exam costs?

The cost of each CCWA exam is \$130 which is used to cover the cost of exam development, creation and maintenance of the online registration system, and all of the associated costs incurred by the CCWA for administration and proctoring the examinations.

9. What are some of the specifics of the examinations such as its format, what it's based on, and passing score?

The CCWA examinations are constructed using national standards as a basis for designing and conducting firework displays, either aerial or close proximity to an audience. **They are not Virginia specific examinations.** The referenced standards used for the CCWA administered exams are NFPA 1123-10 (aerial) and NFPA 1126-10 (proximate) respectively. The exams are closed-book and comprised of 100, multiple choice questions. A passing score of 70% correct is required.

10. Will there be additional test dates and/or locations added or is the CCWA list in final form?

Yes, more dates and locations can be added but it is up to each college to offer them. You may wish to contact the community college of your choice to inquire on the possibility.

11. What if I need or wish to take both examinations on the same date to get certified in both categories?

You should separately register for each exam in the manner described above being sure to select the same date and location. Also, be sure to print your receipt which will contain your P.T.S. assigned "User ID" which must be presented at the test site.

12. What happens if I do not pass an examination? How soon can I re-take the exam?

You can re-take an examination as soon as you complete the registration and payment process again. This means you will not be able to re-take the examination(s) on the same day and location. As part of the registration process, you will have to select a future date and location, assuming space is available. You are not limited on the number of times you can register and take selected examinations.

13. If I'm an out-of-state resident, can I take the examination(s) in my home state?

Some out-of-state college assessment centers have the resources available to proctor exams and work with CCWA. First, contact the local community college that is most convenient for you and ask about their willingness and ability to proctor an online exam. If they are open to accommodating the exam, get the contact information for the college and provide that information to CCWA. Second, CCWA will work directly with the contact person at the home state college to finalize the arrangement. In addition to the CCWA exam fee, you will be responsible to complete any additional registration processes and pay any additional fees that may be required by your local community college for

proctoring the exam. It is expected that this additional fee would be significantly less than the cost incurred for traveling to Virginia to take the exam(s).

14. What if I have other questions about the examination?

For any and additional questions or concerns you may have about the CCWA administered examination, please contact the CCWA through an email to pyrotechnics@ccwa.vccs.edu or by calling 804-523-2292.

15. What if I have questions about the certification itself?

All questions about certifications can be directed to the SFMO through an email to statefiremarshal@vdfp.virginia.gov or by calling the SFMO 804-371-0220.

16. Can I apply for both categories of certification or must I choose one or the other?

You may choose one or both.

Effective July 1, 2011, if you choose both, you must follow the instructions provided on the application instructions for simultaneously obtaining both aerial and proximate certifications and satisfying the specific conditions for special consideration. The special consideration will result in a reduced fee for the certifications. The applications must include the appropriate certification fee and evidence of successfully completing the required examination for each category of certification. If application is made for both categories in compliance with the specific conditions, only one fingerprint card is required to be submitted with the application package.

17. Does the Virginia SFMO have reciprocity with any other state certification or licensing of Pyrotechnicians?

Presently the Virginia SFMO does not have reciprocity with any other state for certifying Pyrotechnicians. While granting reciprocity to other state programs is a desirable goal, the principal reason at this time for not having reciprocity has been the lack of an approved or acceptable examination for Virginia by which the SFMO can use to compare examinations of other state certification or licensing programs. Now with this first approved or acceptable examination, the SFMO can begin the process of reviewing, comparing or assessing other state programs with an eye on granting reciprocity.

18. What does reciprocity mean? What could reciprocity do for me?

For the Virginia SFMO, reciprocity essentially means that if a candidate for certification has taken an examination in another state for licensure or certification as a Pyrotechnician in that state, and the Virginia SFMO has deemed that state's examination to be equal to or better than that approved or accepted for Virginia's purpose, then the candidate does not have to take the Virginia approved examination. When applying for certification, in addition to the other elements listed above (fingerprint card, sufficient qualifying experience and fee), the candidate will still have to provide evidence of having successfully completing that other state's examination. It's recognized that reciprocity could help reduce time and cost of getting certified in Virginia as a Pyrotechnician.

19. When will the SFMO post a list of states granted reciprocity?

That's unknown at this time but if reciprocity is granted in the future, a list will be posted on the SFMO web page.

20. Does every person in attendance or assisting in a fireworks display have to be certified as a Pyrotechnician?

No. Only the person that's in responsible charge of supervising or engaged in the design, setup or conducting of any fireworks display, either inside a building or outdoors is to be certified by the State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) as a "Pyrotechnician" and they must be on-site at the time of setting up and conducting the fireworks display. This allows non-certified personnel the opportunity to gain the needed exposure and experience to become certified in the future.

21. For how long is a Virginia Pyrotechnician certification valid?

It is valid for 3 years from the date of issuance.

22. What is to be done for renewing a Virginia Pyrotechnician certification?

Renewal of a Pyrotechnician certification is granted upon application and meeting all criteria for re-certifying as a Virginia Pyrotechnician. The application must have enclosed or attached to it the required certification fee, a completed fingerprint card as supplied by the SFMO, and evidence of satisfying the continuing education or training requirement.

The candidate for renewing a certification must have accumulated not less than 12 hours in the preceding 3 years the certification was valid. Taking or retaking an examination is not required unless the candidate did not recertify in a satisfactory or timely manner. If a certification is not renewed in a timely or satisfactory manner, they will essentially then have to start over to regain certification including taking an examination.

A document describing what sources and forms of continuing education or training will be accepted by the SFMO for renewal has been posted on the web under "Publications" at http://vafire.com/state_fire_marshall/fireworks.htm.

23. How long does it take to receive the Pyrotechnician certification?

While most likely it will be quicker, allow 45 days to receive a certification card. The SFMO scans the completed fingerprint card and electronically transmits it to the Virginia State Police (VSP) and it then goes to the FBI. The majority of the time the SFMO receives results within 24 to 48 hours exclusive of weekends and holidays. Thus the SFMO is able to issue a card to an applicant within 7 to 10 days, exclusive of weekends and holidays, assuming all other requirements have been satisfactorily met. Occasionally, and without prior knowledge to the SFMO, it takes a much longer time to receive the FBI and VSP results and is the reason for allowing 45 days before receiving a card.