

Recommendations of the Ohio Hazmat Technical Advisory Committee State Certification of Hazardous Materials/WMD Technicians

October 27, 2012

To: The Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS, Fire Training Committee
The Ohio Fire Chiefs Association
The Ohio Emergency Managers Association
The Ohio State Firefighter's Association
The Ohio Association of Fire Service Instructors
The Ohio Professional Fire Fighters

From: The Ohio Hazardous Materials/Mass Decontamination Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

The Ohio Hazmat TAC proposes that the State of Ohio develop and implement a state certification process for public safety Hazardous Materials/WMD Technicians.

Since its inception in 2002, the Ohio Hazmat TAC has worked with the Ohio Emergency Management Agency (OEMA) to improve public safety response to incidents involving hazardous materials in Ohio. The Hazmat TAC has developed and implemented a plan to insure rapid response of well trained and appropriately equipped hazmat team teams to every area of the state. This process included developing a required equipment list (REL), training and personnel requirements, protocols for regional and statewide mutual aid response and dispatch guidelines for the 77 public safety Hazmat teams providing mutual aid through the Ohio Fire Response Plan. The Hazmat TAC has also assisted public safety hazmat teams in self verifying as a NIMS Type I, II or III team based on their equipment and capabilities.

In order to fully comply with NIMS Team Typing, we set up a verification process for voluntary inspection teams to visit each team and verify that they meet the type typing requirements. One of the challenges has been that since the Ohio has no certification for a firefighter serving as a Hazardous Material Technician each entity followed their own interpretation of EPA part 311's requirement that all firefighters follow OSHA 1910.120 (q) when responding to an emergency involving hazardous material. There are a wide variety of hazmat tech training courses and varying minimum hours offered throughout the state which results in inconsistency as to exactly what is required to be known as a Hazmat Technician.

This is not so problematic for local responses, but when an Incident Commander requests assistance from regional mutual aid or the Ohio Fire ERP, it can be unclear what training the responding team will have. This would be the same problem as if all fire departments were permitted to design their own initial firefighter training program with no certification.

In order to bring more uniformity to the position and qualifications of a Hazardous Material/WMD Technician and to provide an Incident Commander with consistency in the competency of personnel when a mutual aid Hazmat team is requested, the Hazmat TAC is proposing state training certification of Hazmat/WMD Technicians.

This letter is to clarify the recommendations of the Hazmat TAC for a proposed new certification of Hazardous Material/WMD Technician. We are NOT proposing that all firefighters be required to become Hazmat/WMD Technicians. We are proposing that individuals wishing to become public safety Hazmat/WMD Technicians complete a state chartered training program following an NFPA based curriculum, complete practical skill testing during that training program and then take a state certification test in order to become certified.

The Hazmat TAC has strongly recommended that all current hazmat technicians be “grandfathered” by simply providing documentation that they attended a Hazardous Material Technician course of at least 24 hours and which meets the OSHA 1910.120(q)(6)(iii) HAZWOPER standard.

Since the current certification is for Hazmat/WMD Technician, the Hazmat TAC recommends that every Hazmat Tech also needs to complete at least sixteen hours of technician level WMD training. For grandfathered technicians, they would be asked to provide documentation that they attended at least 16 hours of WMD training which met the Office of Domestic Preparedness, “Performance Offensive” requirements. If they had not yet completed the WMD training when they were grandfathered, then 16 hours of Performance Offensive (WMD) training would need to be completed by the applicant before the first re-certification date.

For new certifications, the Hazmat TAC is recommending a minimum of 40 hours of training equivalent to the Ohio Hazmat/WMD Technician level course, which meets OSHA 29 CFR 1910.120(q)(6)(iii), the Office of Domestic Preparedness, “Performance Offensive” requirements and addresses NFPA 472 Chapter 7 standards. We feel this course should be taught by an accredited training program (university or college) or a chartered fire training agency. The training program must certify that practical skills were completed and that the student is competent to sit for the state exam. A written certification test should be developed based on the Ohio Hazmat/WMD Technician curriculum.

For continuing education requirements, the Hazmat TAC recommends 16 hours of refresher training per year (48 hours per 3 year cycle) on any Hazmat related subject. Refresher training would be approved by the fire chief, a hazmat team supervisor, an accredited training program, or chartered institution. Monies for this training are available each year through HMEP funds administered by the PUCO. The Hazmat TAC strongly recommends that Hazmat/WMD related fire training (SCBA, foam, flammable liquids, meters, etc.) should be allowed to count as Hazmat/WMD AND Firefighter 1 or 2 continuing education.

The Ohio Hazmat TAC and the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS, Fire Training Committee have been in discussion on the proposed certification for over a year and both organizations support the concept of developing this certification process.

The Ohio Hazmat TAC is asking your organization for input and endorsement of this proposal and to offer suggestions on how to best implement it for the safety of all of Ohio’s Firefighters.

For any questions please contact:

Mark Vedder
Battalion Chief, Solon Fire Rescue
Co-Chair, Ohio Hazmat TAC
MV298@aol.com

Harry Burdick
EMA Director, Marion County, OH
Co-Chair, Ohio Hazmat TAC
disaster.marion@frontier.com