

Emergency Number Professional (ENP) Certification—Is It For You?

By Eric Parry, ENP

So here you are, Joe or Josie NENA member. You have heard about NENA's ENP Certification program. You have read bits and pieces about it. And you are wondering what it is all about and whether or not to take the plunge and go for it. What does it involve? Do you have the knowledge? Do you have the experience? Do you have the background? Is it worth going for? What will it do for you?

How It All Began

In 1992, NENA undertook a study to determine what professional certification was all about, and whether it would be possible to develop a certification process for career 9-1-1 professionals. The NENA Executive Board, under the leadership of Bill Munn, agreed that professional certification for 9-1-1 professionals was a very good idea, and gave the go-ahead to develop an approach to further research and develop a certification plan.

Determining What Was Needed

NENA contracted Professional Testing Corporation (PTC), a New York company that assists in administering certification programs for various professional groups. What NENA had to do next was develop an industry standard for certification. This standard had to come from within the profession, and had to define competencies for the standard. The level of mastery of the competencies would then determine the standard of certification. All this had to be done according to professional standards and under the close scrutiny of PTC. In the early going, Mr. Munn formed a small committee and was assisted with consulting advice from Dr. Robert Mathis and his associate, Carol McKnight. They interviewed many NENA members at the Las Vegas Annual Conference in 1994 and further surveyed, by mail, a cross section of members throughout North America. They asked what each member felt a 9-1-1 professional must know to function effectively and to be successful. The result was the competencies that appear in the NENA ENP Body of Knowledge (BOK). The BOK is effectively the basis for certification. It is the Job Analysis of this profession.

The Body of Knowledge (BOK)

The BOK, which was finalized before the NENA Annual Conference in 1995, is divided into two main areas: 9-1-1 Operations and 9-1-1 Management. (The BOK appears in the ENP Application Handbook, and in the ENP Certification Study Guide. Both are available through NENA Headquarters.)

Under the heading 9-1-1 Operations are such topics as Principles of Telecommunications, Types and Features of 9-1-1 Systems, and other related Operations issues. The 9-1-1 Operations portion of the Body of Knowledge represents 40 percent of the overall BOK content.

Under the heading 9-1-1 Management are such topics as Management Functions, Contingency and Disaster Planning, Management of Employees, and other related Management issues. The 9-1-1 Management portion of the Body of Knowledge represents 60 percent of the overall BOK content.

The BOK is the foundation for ENP Certification. The Certification examination questions correlate to the BOK. In other words, 40 percent of the Certification examination questions relate to 9-1-1 Operations, and 60 percent of the Certification examination questions relate to 9-1-1 Management.

Dr. Robert Cobb of Pacesetter Management guided the process of creating and reviewing the examination questions, which took about 18 months to complete. The first ENP examination date was in April 1997. More about the examination later...

The NENA Institute Board

One of the first requirements of the certification process was to establish an independent group of people to oversee the entire process. This group was called the NENA Institute Board. The NENA Institute Board was formed to develop and maintain professional standards of the ENP program. It consists of a volunteer group of 9-1-1 professionals who form the body that administers and oversees the ENP Certification program. The Board functions as an independent group tasked with all aspects of Certification such as eligibility, experience criteria, examination content, level of competency, re-certification, and other related issues.

The First Hurdle

The first hurdle in determining whether or not you qualify for certification concerns the time you have spent working as a Manager or Supervisor in emergency communications. You must have, as a minimum, three years of experience as a:

- Manager or supervisor in Emergency Communications Management; or
- Commercial provider of Emergency Communications Management Products or Services; or
- Sworn Personnel holding a management or supervisory role in Emergency Communications Service.

Service as a telecommunicator only (i.e., no management or supervisory experience) does not qualify you for ENP Certification. If, however, you are in doubt about your qualifications concerning your background or service in Emergency Communications, you may present your situation in writing to the NENA Institute Board for consideration.

Scoring Points

Now you need at least 10 points to qualify to take the ENP examination. If you meet the three-year rule (above), you receive two points for each **additional** year of service in emergency communications, to a maximum of 10 points. You also receive points for education: an Associate Degree earns you 2 points, a Bachelor's Degree earns you 4, and a Graduate Degree earns you 6 points. If you have taken any NENA courses, you earn 1 point for each course, to a maximum of 4 points. Holding office in NENA at the National or state/provincial level earns you 1 point. Other professional certification also earns you 1 point. So scoring points is not that difficult, and

any person who has kicked around in NENA and emergency communications should have no trouble at all accumulating them!

Applying

If you have made it this far, then you need to apply to NENA using the form provided in the ENP Application Handbook. You must submit your Application at least 4 weeks in advance of the examination date. The ENP Certification fee is \$295 (US dollars) for NENA members, and \$375 (US dollars) for non-members. Contact NENA Headquarters at (800) 332-3911 to receive a copy of the ENP Application Handbook.

The ENP Examination

Oh joy, a multiple-choice examination—but this is how you will be tested. In short, there are 150 questions, and you need to answer 105 of them correctly. This translates to a pass mark of 70 percent (we do not like to use the term pass or fail, so let's change that to, "You must master 70 percent of the questions"). If you do not master 70 percent, you can apply to retake the examination on any of the next scheduled testing dates. The reapplication fee is \$95 (US dollars).

The examination has been designed to be as palatable as possible. There are no trick questions. There are no "all of the above/none of the above/some of the above" type questions. All acronyms appearing on the test are spelled out. The test questions follow a consistent format. The "stem" is the part of the question that makes a statement or poses a question. The choices of answers that follow the stem consist of a correct (or best) answer and 3 distracters. There is only **one** correct answer. The distracters may be plausible but are all incorrect choices. Each question has been written and reviewed thoroughly by professionals currently serving in emergency communications, and by the NENA Institute Board. Questions are regularly reviewed and are up-to-date. The examination time is three hours, although you likely will finish before then. You must bring a Number 2 pencil with you. This is important—the answer sheet is computer scored and no other pencil will work!

I almost forgot: two different ENP examinations are available, an American version and a Canadian version. If you want a real challenge, try taking the examination that would be foreign to you! The only difference is in the legislation and regulatory portions of the examination, and those questions comprise only 5 percent of the examination.

Examination Dates

The upcoming dates for the ENP examinations are June 11, 2000 at the NENA Annual Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, and October 21, 2000 at selected locations throughout the US and Canada. Check with NENA Headquarters or see your latest issue of NENA's Connections newsletter to see if there is a testing center near you. Remember, if you can get five or more of your colleagues to apply, a testing center will be set up at a location near you. This will only happen if you are all registered and paid before the application deadline.

Preparing for the Examination

Eat healthy. Get plenty of rest. Be mentally alert. Preparation for the ENP examination is very much a common sense thing. Here are some other suggestions:

- Self-analysis—Review the Body of Knowledge and determine your weak and strong areas. No matter who you are, there will be areas of the BOK that will require further study. Typically, most applicants need to review 9-1-1 Legislation.
- Study groups—After your self-analysis, you may wish to get a group of people together to form a study group. This is very effective in cutting to the chase, particularly if you have people from varied backgrounds. If you are a PSAP manager, and you need more technical information, you should invite someone with current technical background.
- Self study—If a study group is not for you, then you have to do it on your own. I suggest getting a copy of the ENP Study Guide, and a copy of the new ENP Reference Manual. The Reference Manual is very good and deals with most of the operations issues. The set of NENA published text books will also help you. And for information regarding the regulatory and legislation questions, the Internet is invaluable. (Contact NENA Headquarters to order the ENP Study Guide or ENP Reference Manual.)
- Sample test questions—Try the sample test questions in the ENP Application Handbook. They are very similar to the type of questions you will encounter on the examination.

Is It Worth It?

Absolutely. It is about time those of us who have toiled many years in this business finally have a Certification process available. Practically every other group around us—from Telecommunicators to Police Officers to Firefighters to Paramedics—has a certification model. So it is about time that we have one. Whenever I see the initials ENP behind a name, it is a sign to me that this person was concerned enough about emergency communications to get certified in his or her profession.

There is also a re-certification process. Re-certification is the incentive to keep growing as a certified professional. It will be the subject of another article in the next issue of *NENA News*.

And in Conclusion

There are now nearly 400 Emergency Number Professionals worldwide. As the numbers grow, so does the recognition of the letters “ENP.” As knowledge of this certification grows, so will the expectation that you be certified as a 9-1-1 Professional. If you ever change jobs or apply for that dream position you have always wanted, ENP Certification will definitely be a plus, and may even be the deciding factor.

For more information, contact any NENA Institute Board member, call NENA Headquarters at (800) 332-3911, or visit the NENA web site at www.nena.org. Don't forget to ask for the ENP Application Handbook, and order the ENP Study Guide and ENP Reference Manual!

2000 NENA Institute Board Members

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