

HELPFUL TIPS

for Agency Training Program Certification

APCO certification ensures that an agency's telecommunicators meet minimum national training requirements.

By Crystal McDuffie

Initial and continuing training for public safety telecommunicators (PSTs) is exceedingly important as they provide essential services to the public in an ever-expanding and rapidly changing public safety environment. APCO Agency Training Program Certification (ATPC) is based on the APCO American National Standard (ANS) Minimum Training Standards for PST. APCO is recognized by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) as an Accredited Standards Developer (ASD). This designation ensures that our standards are produced in an open, consensus-based process.

The standard identifies minimum training requirements for PSTs performing the duties of call taking, fire service dispatching, law enforcement dispatching and emergency medical services (EMS) dispatching. This standard is based on research compiled from

multiple occupational analysis workshops conducted throughout the nation.

The process for occupational analysis involves public safety communications professionals from throughout the country who are known for being the “top

performers.” These workers become the panel of experts (high-performing incumbent workers) who collectively describe the major duties and related tasks of the PST occupation. Brainstorming techniques are used to obtain the collective expertise and consensus of the panel. The panel works under the guidance of a trained facilitator to develop the Occupational Analysis Profile Chart. It contains a list of general areas of competence called *DUTIES* and the *TASKS* which make up that duty. The completed chart is a graphic profile of the duties and tasks performed by successful workers in the occupation. The panel also identifies the general knowledge and skills, the tools, equipment, supplies, and materials used, and





the important worker behaviors essential for success.

Over 100 high-performing PSTs representing various agencies participated in workshops used to create the Occupational Analysis Profile Chart for the development of APCO ANS 3.103.2.2015 Minimum Training Standards for PSTs. The draft standard was submitted through three different public review and comment periods before the final draft completed the ANSI process.

ATPC was originally called Project 33, which referenced the project that initiated the first APCO Minimum Training Standard for PST. At its 1995 annual conference, then-President Ross Morris announced APCO would develop a telecommunications training

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standard for public safety agencies nationwide (National Public Safety Telecommunications Training Standard). At that time many states had not developed any standardized training for their agencies. Morris assigned this task to the APCO Operating Procedures and Training Committee. It selected a Standard Development Committee comprised of experts from public safety communications agencies throughout the nation. The information gathered helped APCO build

the foundation for the National Public Safety Telecommunicator Training Standard, which is the minimum standard used today.¹

The first agency was certified in 2006, in what was originally a paper process. Today, agencies submit their application and documentation through an online program designed for this submission and review process.

Building and implementing a successful agency training program requires many



SHALL statements in the PST standard are **required** sections in the Agency Training Program Certification

SHOULD statements in the PST standard are **recommended** sections in the Agency Training Program Certification.

resources and a good deal of dedication. Applying for certification demonstrates the agency's commitment to training and to meeting national standards. Receiving certification for a training program is a major accomplishment for the agency, its staff and the community it serves. Many emergency communications centers (ECCs) have developed their own basic training materials and processes, while others may receive training from commercial training vendors.

The APCO ATPC is a formal mechanism for public safety agencies to certify their training programs as meeting the APCO PST Training Standard. This program does not certify individuals. While there has been some interest from educational entities, the program only certifies non-commercial public safety communications training programs.

THE PROCESS

Agencies interested in obtaining certification must follow a specific process designed to educate, prepare and, finally, apply for certification. The process begins with understanding the APCO ATPC Rules and Procedures.² Next, agencies should download and understand the APCO ANS 3.103.2-2015 Minimum Training Standards for Public Safety Telecommunicators.³ This step allows the agency to understand the requirements for ATPC. The agency should then register for the "Agency Training" course via myapcointl.org, complete a short, online training session and quiz. The agency will upload the resulting certificate as proof of training. Once these steps are complete, the agency may submit the non-refundable application fee of \$500 and gain access to the ATPC application. From the time that an agency pays the application

fee, it has 12 months to complete and submit the application with required proofs.

The application is directly aligned with the APCO standard. Each chapter and sub-section in the application must be completed by the agency, including explanations and proofs or documentation related to each section. "Shall" statements in the standard are required sections of the application, while "should" statements are recommended. All agencies complete chapters 1-6 of the application. Agencies complete chapters 7-10 based on their specific discipline(s).

Once the application is submitted, it undergoes an administrative review by APCO staff. This review is to ensure the application is substantially complete before assigning it for review. If the application is found to be incomplete, the agency will be notified to correct the application and re-submit. Common problems include incomplete information on the application tab; no explanations provided; and lack of documents or proofs attached to the sections. It is important to note that all submitted materials remain the property of the agency and will not be disseminated beyond those directly involved in the review process. Agencies should redact names or other identifying information as needed.

Applications are assigned to two evaluators. We typically call this "first review." These evaluators remain anonymous to the agency and any correspondence is handled directly by APCO staff. Evaluators are selected for the ATPC Committee each year and receive specific training for evaluating applications. Once the first review is complete, APCO staff will review the evaluators' recommendation and communicate the decision to the agency. If the agency has submitted all materials and the evaluators

recommend certification, the agency will be certified and will receive a letter from the APCO International President. Additionally, a press release is issued by APCO and the agency name is added to the website as a certified agency. The agency will also be awarded a plaque at the APCO Annual Conference & Expo. Applications submitted by December 1 of each year will be honored at the following year's conference. As an example, if the agency submits the application by December 1, 2019, it is eligible to receive recognition at the APCO 2020 Annual Conference.

If the evaluators find discrepancies in the application and submitted materials, they will recommend the agency's application be denied. APCO staff will communicate with the agency and provide a letter stating the application has been denied. The letter contains specific information about the discrepancies and what is needed to complete the application. The agency has 30 days to request a 90-day extension to complete the areas identified in the letter. This request may be in the form of an email to designated APCO staff. Once the extension is approved, APCO will reopen the application so the agency can complete and submit it again. The agency must submit the application within the 90-day extension, after which the application will be reviewed a second time by the evaluators. This is called "second review." The decision of the evaluators after the second review is the final decision and the agency is either certified or denied. Agencies who are denied certification after a second review may reapply, paying the application fee of \$500 after a six-month waiting period.

Pre-planning is a very important step for the agency. While the agency is completing the prerequisites, it should begin the planning phase. A good starting point would be to create folders for each section of the standard and begin placing explanations and supporting documentation into those folders. This important step will help streamline the process when uploading information into the application. It will also help agencies identify areas that may need more structure or documentation.

Examples of documentation/proofs are shown below. While this list is not all-inclusive, it should help you to identify the kinds of documents your agency will need to provide. All documents should be described in the explanation field of the program by

name and page number where reviewers can locate the specific information for that section. Documents should be currently in use by the agency and completed documents should be used.

- Lesson plans
- PowerPoints
- Worksheets
- Handouts
- Outlines
- Training manual
- Class roster
- Documentation of verbal training or demonstration
- Certificates

- Quality assurance forms
- Completed test
- Daily Observation Reports (DORs)
- Directives
- Policies
- Mandates
- Performance plans
- Evaluations
- Documented testing (written or practical)

Another helpful tip is to reach out to agencies already certified and discuss challenges and lessons learned through the process.

Certification of an agency's training program demonstrates commitment to training, professionalism and quality of service. Join

the 27 agencies that received certification this year! ●

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REFERENCES

- 1 <https://www.apcointl.org/about-apco/apco-projects/>
- 2 <https://www.apcointl.org/download/agency-training-program-rules-and-procedures/?wpdmdl=5935>
- 3 <https://www.apcointl.org/download/minimum-training-standards-for-public-safety-telecommunicators-3/?wpdmdl=6288>

CDE EXAM #51402

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the cost to obtain access to the application? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. \$100.00 b. \$500.00 c. \$250.00 d. \$700.00 2. An agency that submits their application by December 1, 2019, is eligible for recognition at: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. APCO 2019 b. APCO 2020 c. APCO 2021 d. APCO 2022 3. A blank test is an acceptable proof. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 4. APCO ATPC certifies: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Individuals b. Commercial training programs c. Agency training programs d. Communications training officers | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The explanation field should contain: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Name of the document b. Page number c. Copy and paste of the document d. A & B only 6. An agency has _____ months to complete the application once purchased. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. 6 b. 12 c. 18 d. 24 7. If an application is denied during the first review, the agency has _____ days to request a 90-day extension. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. 10 b. 25 c. 30 d. 45 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. All submitted documentation remains the property of the applying agency and is only available to those involved in the review process. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 9. Statements that begin with _____ are required parts of the standard that agencies must meet. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Must b. Will c. Shall d. Should 10. APCO ATPC is important as it recognizes an agency as meeting the Minimum Training for Public Safety Telecommunicators Standard. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False |
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