

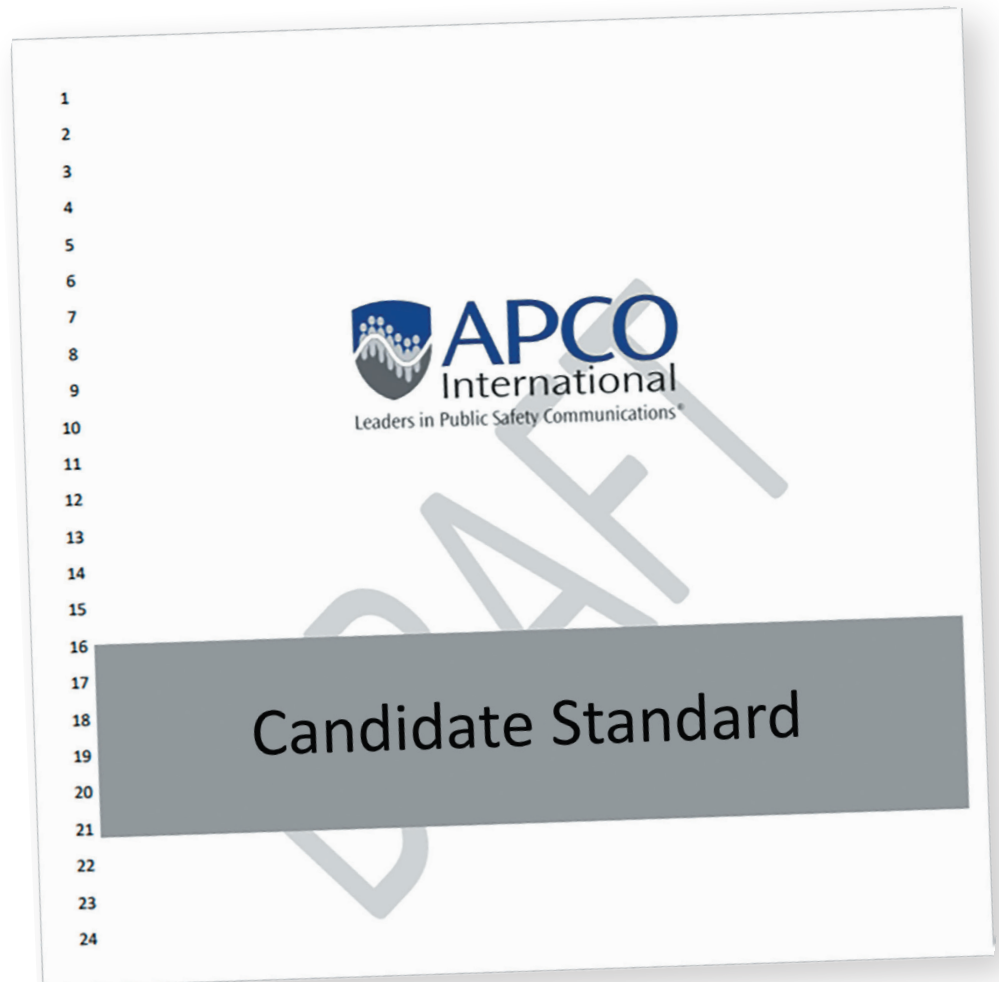
STANDARDS TO TAKE SERIOUSLY

From daily operations to long-term career growth, understanding standards gives you the tools to lead, improve performance and advance in the profession.

By Leighann Schultz

In emergency communication centers (ECC) and throughout public safety, standards are often viewed as technical documents. In reality, they are the framework that support operational excellence, enhance interoperability and define professional credibility. For tomorrow's leaders, understanding how standards work is not only beneficial to the agencies we serve but also essential to our own professional growth.

Standards are consensus-based documents developed by subject matter experts to establish best practices, minimum requirements and performance benchmarks within a profession. At APCO, these standards address areas such as training, quality assurance, managing operational overload, crisis intervention, cybersecurity, Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) and more.



Through an open and collaborative process frontline users, leaders, industry partners and other stakeholders contribute expertise to ensure that standards are practical,

achievable and reflective of real-world operations. The result is a living body of knowledge that evolves alongside technology and the needs of the communities we serve.

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THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Standards are developed through a structured and transparent process. Committees composed of experienced professionals draft proposed standards based on research, operational experience and industry data. These drafts are reviewed internally and then released for public comment to ensure diverse input. After revisions and approval through the appropriate governance channels, the standard is published.

This process ensures:

- **Relevance** — Standards reflect current operational realities and set realistic expectations.
- **Credibility** — Standards are built on consensus and professional expertise, shaped by those working in the field.
- **Accountability** — Agencies can measure performance against defined benchmarks. Shareholders can better understand how the ECC operates and performs.

WHY STANDARDS MATTER

Emergency communications is a high-stakes environment. Decisions are made in seconds, often with life-altering consequences.

Standards provide a baseline for consistency and risk reduction. They establish

training and competency expectations, promote interoperability, support defensible policies and strengthen organizational credibility. In short, standards help ensure that excellence is not accidental; it is intentional and measurable. And when trouble comes, they help provide liability protection. When additional resources are needed, they help justify the expense.

TOOLS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Understanding and engaging with standards can significantly enhance your professional development in several ways:

Building Technical Competence. Familiarity with standards deepens your understanding of industry best practices. Whether you are a telecommunicator, trainer, supervisor, quality assurance specialist or executive leader, knowing the “why” behind operational requirements strengthens decision-making and leadership. Standards provide context for policy development, training design, performance evaluation and technology implementation. This knowledge positions you as a subject matter resource within and outside your agency.

Enhancing Leadership Skills. Leaders who understand standards can align agency

goals with nationally recognized benchmarks. This alignment improves strategic planning, budgeting discussions, accreditation efforts and risk management. By leveraging standards, you move from reactive problem-solving to proactive organizational development. This is an essential leadership quality.

Expanding Career Opportunities. Participation in standards development committees or workgroups provides exposure to national-level collaboration. It builds your professional network and demonstrates commitment to advancing the profession. Serving in these roles enhances your resume, broadens your perspective beyond local operations and positions you as an industry contributor rather than a bystander.

Supporting Continuing Education. Standards complement professional certifications and continuing education programs. They provide the framework for many training curricula and credentialing pathways. By studying and applying standards, you reinforce competencies that are recognized across the profession. This alignment strengthens both your technical credibility and your long-term career mobility. Leaders who know the importance of standards and how to integrate them into their agency training stand out for professional advancement.

FROM AWARENESS TO ENGAGEMENT

Understanding standards is the first step. Engagement is the next. Consider the following actions:

- Review applicable standards relevant to your current role or the roles you are passionate about.
- Compare your agency’s practices against established benchmarks to identify areas for improvement.
- Volunteer for committee service or public comment opportunities. Find a role that suits your abilities and needs.
- Share knowledge with peers and incorporate standards into training discussions. Become a driver of change in your agency; lead from where you are.

Professional development is not limited to formal education. It includes contributing to the profession’s collective growth. Standards provide a structured pathway to do exactly that.



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THE BIG PICTURE

At its core, standards development reflects the collaborative spirit of emergency communications. It is professionals coming together to define excellence, reduce risk and elevate performance nationwide.

When you engage with standards, you do more than follow guidance. You help shape the future of the profession. That

participation strengthens your expertise, expands your leadership capacity and reinforces your commitment to service.

In an industry built on precision, accountability and trust, understanding how standards work and why they matter is crucial. They are the foundation of organizational success and individual professional growth. ●

Leighann Schultz is the Quality Assurance Supervisor and Peer Support Coordinator for Cobb County DEC in Marietta, Georgia. She also served as Chair of the recently released APCO International Standards Development Committee (SDC) Core Competencies and Minimum Training Standards for Public Safety Communications Quality Assurance Evaluators.

CDE EXAM #77095

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What are professional standards mainly designed to do?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Replace agency leadershipb. Establish best practices and performance benchmarksc. Limit communication between agenciesd. Eliminate the need for training2. According to the article, standards in public safety are often misunderstood as only:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Training manualsb. Laws that must be followedc. Technical documentsd. Financial reports3. Who helps develop professional standards through the consensus process?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Only federal government officialsb. Subject matter experts and public safety professionalsc. College professorsd. Private citizens with no experience4. Which organization is mentioned as developing standards for emergency communications professionals?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. FEMAb. CDCc. NASAd. APCO | <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Standards help improve cooperation between agencies by supporting:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Competitionb. Interoperabilityc. Secrecyd. Budget reductions6. What type of topics do APCO standards address?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. How to decorate for National Public Safety Telecommunicators Weekb. Appropriate placement of bathrooms in the centerc. Areas like quality assurance, training and cybersecurityd. Anger management7. How can participating in standards development benefit professionals?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. It can help develop leadership and subject knowledgeb. It replaces the need for job experiencec. It guarantees a promotiond. It reduces job responsibilities | <ol style="list-style-type: none">8. Why is it important for future leaders in emergency communications to understand standards?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. It helps them guide operations and improve their agenciesb. It proves they are better than everyone elsec. It removes the need for teamworkd. It limits professional development9. Standards are created through what kind of process?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Secret voting by executivesb. Open and collaborative discussionc. Random selectiond. Private corporate decisions10. According to the article, understanding standards helps professionals:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Avoid learning new skillsb. Forget the stresses of the jobc. Focus only on technical equipmentd. Build credibility and grow in their careers |
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