

**National Fireplace Institute® (NFI)  
Policy Handbook  
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# National Fireplace Institute® (NFI) Policy Handbook

**Adopted by the Hearth, Patio and Barbecue Board of Governors on November 22, 2019**

The National Fireplace Institute® (NFI) is the professional certification division of the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Education Foundation (HPBEF), a 501(c)3 non-profit educational organization. HPBEF is ruled by a Board of Governors that includes representatives from the industry, public safety, and the allied service industry.

The NFI is the professional certification division of the HPBEF. NFI's objective is to increase public safety by establishing meaningful credentials for professionals involved in planning, installing and servicing residential hearth appliance and venting systems.

The goal of the NFI is to improve public safety by certifying that hearth installers/planners have successfully passed a rigorous examination of knowledge identified by hearth industry experts and practitioners as fundamental to competent planning and installation of hearth systems. NFI certifies technicians and installers in four hearth products specializations: NFI Gas Specialist, NFI Woodburning Specialist, NFI Pellet Specialist and NFI Hearth Design Specialist. Participation in the certification process should be a challenging and rewarding professional experience that can increase knowledge, confidence, and public recognition.

The information provided here reflects the policies and procedures that directly affect examinees and NFI Specialists pursuing certification renewal, including:

- exam characteristics
- pre-exam information and procedures
- exam results and appeals
- options and requirements for renewing certification.

Policy and procedures are subject to change. Check the NFI website or contact NFI for the latest version.

## **I. Exam Characteristics**

### *A. Purpose and Limitations*

The NFI is a voluntary, nationally administered certification program. NFI certifications are awarded to examinees who attain a passing score on exams that test subject matter recognized as fundamentally important to the planning and installation of different types of hearth systems. NFI certifies that examinees have successfully passed an exam or exams. While the certification is a recognized indicator of commitment to professional accomplishment, it does not guarantee competence. Certification may be recognized as a requirement for licensing to perform installation in some jurisdictions, but certification in itself is not a license.

Certification is a mark of accomplishment that is widely recognized as an indication of professional status and commitment. In a growing number of local and state jurisdictions, NFI certification is being

considered as an appropriate pre-requisite for hearth products installation. NFI accordingly provides identification and promotional materials to successful examinees.

### *B. Basis of Exams*

In order to ensure fairness, job relevance, and effectiveness of the certification process, examinations are based on a formal job analysis and recognized procedures for exam reliability and validity. These recognized, formal processes include participation of industry experts, survey of practitioners, and collaboration with testing consultants. The results of the industry survey provided a guide for determining exam content and appropriate percentages of questions in specific categories of job knowledge. An exam blueprint was developed for each certification.

### *C. Specializations Offered*

Examinees can become NFI Certified Specialists in Gas, Woodburning, and Pellet. Initially, those seeking to become NFI certified must pass the Core Knowledge exam to become eligible and also pass one of the specialty exams (Gas, Woodburning or Pellet). The Core Knowledge reference manual covers topics such as combustion and heat transfer. The specialty reference manuals cover information about appliances and venting systems of each specialization:

- Gas: all major gas burning hearth appliances and their venting systems
- Woodburning: both factory-built solid fuel fireplaces and all major types of cordwood burning hearth appliances and their venting systems
- Pellet: all major wood pellet and biomass burning hearth appliances and their venting systems.

NFI Certified Specialists can elect to take one or both of the other specialty exams without having to take the Core Knowledge exam again as long as the initial specialty certification is current.

NFI offers recognition to Certified Specialists who have successfully gained NFI certifications in all three specialties (Gas, Woodburning and Pellet) and are known as **Master Hearth Professionals (MHPs)**.

The Hearth Design Specialist is a stand-alone certification. The Hearth Design Specialist manual contains technical knowledge a sales person needs to know about woodburning, gas and pellet.

### *D. Content of Exams*

A full Index of Knowledge Statements (a comprehensive list of the knowledge needed to successfully plan hearth products) for each specialization is available in each NFI Reference Manual, or by contacting NFI.

## **II. Pre-Exam Information and Procedures**

### *A. Registration*

To take an NFI exam the examinee may attend a sponsored NFI Partner event or Expo, take the proctored computerized exam at an NFI-approved testing center, or online (proctored remotely) from the comfort of your own home or office. All NFI exams include an online review class for the specialty. Many Partner events and Expo offer the option of a live review class prior to the exam.

- Examinees must register with NFI for exams to be taken online, at an NFI-approved testing center, or at Expo. Full payment for the exam and any related study materials must accompany registration.
- If the registration is for a computerized exam, NFI will authorize the computer testing service to administer the exam and provide information to the applicant regarding how to contact the computer testing service to set up a time and location for the exam.
- If study materials are purchased with the exam order, NFI will ship them Priority Mail when the registration form is approved.

### *B. Non-discrimination*

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), NFI will provide reasonable accommodation for those with disabilities, such as providing extra time and/or facilitating having someone to read the exam to the examinee. No accommodation need be offered that fundamentally alters the measurement of the skills or knowledge that the exam is intended to test, or which is an undue burden on NFI, including, but not limited to, offering the exam in any language other than English. In order to request accommodations for disabilities, examinees should contact NFI to obtain an ADA Special Request Form. The Request Form must be submitted to the NFI so that special considerations can be provided and the exam can be scheduled through the appropriate proctor.

### *C. Pricing*

Pricing for exams and/or study materials is available from NFI for exams taken at computerized testing center, online or at Expo. Visit [www.nficertified.org](http://www.nficertified.org) for more information. Pricing for Partner Events can be obtained by contacting the event sponsor.

### *D. Time Limits, Rescheduling, Cancellation, and Refunds*

#### ***For Computerized Testing:***

1. Exam Deadlines
  - Examinees have 6 months from registration and payment of fees to take examinations.
  - Extensions past the 6 month time period may be granted by NFI on a case-by-case basis.
2. Rescheduling Exams
  - If a time to take the exam is scheduled and the examinee is unable to make the scheduled appointment without proper notification of the cancellation, an administrative fee of \$69 will be charged to reschedule the exam.
3. Cancelling Exams
  - Within the 6 months after registration, exam registration can be cancelled and a refund requested, or a credit to allow a different examinee to take the exam, if the request is made in writing to NFI.
  - A refund for the exam, less a \$69 administrative fee, will be granted.
  - Refunds/credits for exams may be made after the 6 month period by the NFI on a case-by-case basis.
  - Refunds are made for study materials only if they are returned to NFI in good condition (no rips, tears, writing on pages or highlighting) within 6 months of purchase. No refunds are made for related shipping costs to return the manual to NFI.

#### ***For Expo Exams:***

- Within 6 months of Expo, if an examinee registered to take the exam at Expo and did not, the examinee may take a computerized version of the exam if the request is made in writing to the NFI.

### III. Exam Preparation

#### A. Resource Materials

The primary reference resources for the exams are the most current version of the NFI *Reference Manual* for each specialty certification published by the HPBEF. In addition, job experience, familiarity with manufacturer's installation instruction manuals, and fundamental construction knowledge may be required or helpful.

#### B. Preparation Methods

**Self-study of the current NFI Reference Manual is strongly recommended, even for experienced professionals.** In addition, organized exam review sessions are offered online and at a number of locations at different times.

### IV. Exam Information

- The examinations consist of multiple choice type questions. The number of questions varies with each specialty certification exam.
- At some Partner events or at Expo, the exams are taken on paper test forms to be filled out with provided number 2 pencils. These test forms are scanned and scored electronically.
- Computerized exams are taken:
  - On provided computers at an NFI-approved testing center, Expo, and at some Partner events; or
  - On the examinee's computer if the examinee purchased an online exam.
- NFI exams are closed book exams. No study materials are allowed in the testing area.
- Only hand held, non-programmable calculators are permitted during testing. Other calculators, including cell phones are not permitted. Sharing calculators is not permitted. Online calculators are available for computerized exams.
- Exam proctors cannot answer questions about the content of the exam.
- Any testing irregularities should be reported to the proctor and/or NFI.

### V. Exam Scoring and Results

#### A. Results and Feedback

- Pass/fail results for paper exams are sent by NFI via e-mail to the examinee once NFI receives and scores the exams. Pass/fail results for computerized exams are available to the examinee upon completion of the exam.
- The exam results indicate whether the examinee passed or failed, based on overall performance in all categories of assessed knowledge. An overall numerical score or grade is not reported. The Candidate Feedback Report provides feedback on the percentages of correctly answered questions in each knowledge category. It also provides the identifying numbers of Knowledge Statements associated with the missed questions on the exam. An Index of Knowledge Statements provided in

each Hearth Reference Manual facilitates reinforcement and further study by linking each Statement to sections in the manual.

- Examinees who do not pass the exam receive the Candidate Feedback Report and information about retesting by e-mail.

#### *B. Confidentiality and Publication*

- Examinees agree that by registering and passing NFI exams that their names and furnished contact information will be published on the NFI website and in other media. An examinee may opt out of appearing on the NFI website by logging in to their NFI account or by notifying the NFI office in writing.
- Renewal dates for certifications are considered public information and may be provided to employers, exam sponsoring organizations, and the public.

#### *C. Retesting*

- Examinees who fail an exam and wish to retest must register and pay a retesting fee (listed on the NFI website).
- Examinees should be aware that exams and reference manuals are revised on a regular basis and should check to see whether their reference manual is the current edition for the exam.
- Examinees who fail an exam and wish to retest shall wait 10 days before taking the exam again.

#### *D. Exam Results Appeals*

An examinee who fails an NFI Exam may appeal the results of the exam to the HPBEF/NFI Board of Governors. The appeal must be received by NFI within 30 days of receipt of exam results. The appeal must be in writing and must include the basis or reason for the appeal. The appeal may result in rejection (exam results stand), rescoring, and/or retesting, or granting of certification.

#### *E. Certification Recognition*

##### **Individual Certifications**

- Examinees who successfully pass the NFI Core Knowledge exam and a NFI specialty exam (Gas, Woodburning or Pellet) will be designated NFI Certified Specialists. Passage of the Core Knowledge exam is only required in conjunction with the initial specialty sought. Expiration dates for those that only hold one certification are based on the date the examinee successfully passes both the Core Knowledge exam and one of the specialty exams.
- Examinees who successfully pass the Hearth Design Specialist exam will be designated NFI Certified Specialists.
- Successful examinees will receive test results and feedback, a wall certificate, an identification card (with photo if provided), or a lapel pin for the Hearth Design Specialist certification. Internet listings with company contact information and recognition materials such as decals and clothing patches are also provided. Additional recognition materials, also including tee shirts, hats, and large decals can be purchased through [www.nficertified.org](http://www.nficertified.org).
- The company of the employee or employees who hold the certification(s) can identify their company as having an NFI Certified Specialist on staff as long as an employee or employees holds/hold current NFI certification(s) in good standing.

- Identification includes use of the NFI trademark logo in public relations and advertising materials. The company cannot claim installation or planning by NFI Certified Specialists unless they are carried out or directly supervised (on-site) by a current NFI Certified Specialist.
- Although fees related to an individual's certification may have been provided for by a third party (e.g. the employer), the certification earned is the sole property of the examinee, and company identification rights (above) are transferrable upon any changes in employment. The NFI Certified Specialist is responsible for providing NFI with corrections or changes to contact information.

### **Multiple Certifications**

- NFI Certified Specialists can elect to take one or both of the other specialty exams without having to take the Core Knowledge exam again as long as the initial specialty certification is current.
- **Master Hearth Professional (MHP) Designation:** Specialists who currently hold all three specialty certifications (Gas, Woodburning, and Pellet) will be designated as Master Hearth Professionals (MHP).

### *F. Length of Certification*

- **Specialty Exams (Gas, Woodburning and Pellet):** Upon passing the Core Knowledge and the specialty exam, the Certified Specialist will be certified by NFI for a period of three years from the end of the month the second exam was passed. For example, if an exam is taken and passed on January 10, 2018, the certification is valid through January 31, 2021.
- **Hearth Design Specialist (HDS):** Upon passing the HDS exam, the Specialist will be certified by NFI for a period of three years from the end of the month the exam was passed. For example, if an exam is taken and passed on January 10, 2018, the certification is valid through January 31, 2021.
- Near the end of the certification period, the NFI Certified Specialist must renew the certification in order to retain the credentials and their benefits by one of the following methods:
  - Retesting
  - **or**
  - Continuing Education

## **VI. Certification Renewal Information**

### *A. Requirements for Renewing Certifications by Taking an Exam*

- If a NFI Certified Specialist does not have the required number of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to renew a certification, or if the Specialist just prefers to pass the new version of the exam to renew the certification, it will be necessary to:
  - a. Purchase the NFI renewal exam package. Renewal exams can be taken, with advance registration as outlined in Section II.
  - b. The renewal expiration date (month and day) remains the same if the exam is purchased at the discounted price.
  - c. If the Specialist is renewing the initial specialty certification, the Specialist must pass the NFI Core Knowledge exam and the initial specialty exam (Gas, Woodburning or Pellet).
  - d. Submit a new digital photograph if a new photograph on the new ID card is desired.

### *B. Requirements for Renewing Certifications by Accruing CEUs*

- NFI Certified Specialists wanting to renew by accruing the required number of CEUs (as outlined in Section VII) must log into the NFI website to renew the expiring certification(s) online.
- All qualifying CEUs must be earned prior to the expiration date of the certification(s) being renewed.
- Any extra CEUs earned during an initial certification period will not carry over into the next certification period.

**Update & Reinforcement Course Requirement:** The HPBEF/NFI Board was concerned that NFI Certified Specialists that renew their certification by CEUs may never know what changes have occurred in the past three years. In June 2009, the Board added a requirement that starting in 2013 a Certified Specialist renewing a certification by earning CEUs must also take an "Update & Reinforcement Course" (URC). The URC may be taken any time within a year of when the certification expires. The URC is available online or at other educational events. Once NFI staff receives the completion certificate confirming that the URC was taken by the Specialist, the renewal process will be finalized. There is no extra charge for the online URC, it is included in the renewal fee. Each Specialist will be credited with the applicable Technical CEUs for the URC.

### *C. Failure to Renew Certification*

If the NFI Certified Specialist does not renew a certification before its expiration date:

- NFI will remove the certification listing, and if appropriate, the Specialist's name and contact information from the NFI website. NFI may inform the appropriate individuals, companies and/or organizations (e.g. employer, CSIA, HPBA Affiliate) that the Specialist is no longer certified.
- The Specialist and employer forfeit the right to any use of NFI Certification recognition materials that are based on the expired certification(s).
- A former NFI Certified Specialist who wishes to reinstate the certification more than 12 months after the expiration date must pay full exam fees instead of discounted renewal fees and must successfully pass the exams, including the Core Knowledge and specialty exam.

If there is evidence of misuse, NFI has the right to take legal action against the specialist and/or the employer.

## **VII. CEU Renewal Requirements**

### **For One Certification**

Prior to the expiration of a three-year certification, the Certified Specialist must earn and document **24 CEUs** in these specific categories:

- Technical – (Course subject matter found in the NFI reference manuals) 12 CEUs
- Safety, Health & Liability (SHL) 4 CEUs
- Electives 8 CEUs\*

*\*Note: Extra Technical or SHL CEUs may fulfill Elective CEU requirements*

**TOTAL 24 CEUs**

### **For Two, Three or Four Certifications**

Prior to the expiration of second or third three-year certifications, the Specialist must earn and document a total of **32 CEUs** in the specific categories.

The requirements for two, three or four certifications are as follows:

- Technical – (Course subject matter found in the NFI reference manuals) 16 CEUs
- Safety, Health & Liability (SHL) 4 CEUs
- Professional Development Electives 12 CEUs\*

*\*Note: Extra Technical or SHL CEUs may fulfill Elective CEU requirements.*

## **TOTAL 32 CEUs**

If the Certified Specialist has already renewed the first certification by CEUs (24), the specialist will only need an additional **8 CEUs (minimum 4 Technical; maximum 4 Elective)** by the next certification expiration.

Upon request, NFI can synchronize expiration dates for 2, 3 or 4 certifications if all fees are paid and all CEU/Exam requirements are met. The dates will be synchronized to a median date between the earliest and latest certification's expiration dates. Note: NFI Certified Specialists who hold all three certifications (Gas, Woodburning, and Pellet) and choose either to synchronize expiration dates or to follow unsynchronized expiration date procedures are eligible for designation as Master Hearth Professional (MHP). If the Specialist plans to renew by CEUs, it is strongly recommended that the certification expiration dates be synchronized.

## **VIII. CEU Categories**

### **TECHNICAL**

Hearth Products Technical Subjects: Planning and installation technical subjects for manufactured residential hearth products that are included in NFI Exam knowledge statements, including:

- Product Knowledge
- Codes and Standards
- Venting Principles and Design
- Ventilation (House Pressure)
- Fuel Knowledge
- Installation Planning
- Installation Guidelines and Techniques
- Tools and Gauges
- Troubleshooting and Repair

### **SAFETY, HEALTH, & LIABILITY**

Workplace Safety and Health

Consumer Health and Safety (Hearth Products Issues) Liability

### **ELECTIVES\***

Additional Technical or Safety, Health & Liability sessions OR Business and Profession Subjects, including:

- Business Management
- Sales & Marketing
- Service Department Organization and Management
- Communication Skills
- Hearth Industry Diversification Products subjects related to:
  - Outdoor Living

- Outdoor Room
- Barbecue
- Patio
- Portable Spas
- HVAC
- Exhaust System Maintenance (e.g., chimney sweeping, dryer vent maintenance)

*\*Note: Extra Technical or SHL CEUs may fulfill Elective CEU requirements.*

## **IX. CEU Rules and Regulations**

### *A. General CEU Policy: All Types of Instruction*

1. Industry training must be submitted for CEUs 30 days in advance of the event.
  - a. Exception: For highly standardized programs such as American Red Cross First Aid or CPR, or standard OSHA training programs, prior and formal CEU approval is not required. Proof of attendance is required.
  - b. Applications for courses over 2 hours in length are required to include a timeline that indicates estimated instructional time for major topics and for breaks (refreshment, bathroom, meals, etc.).
  - c. The minimum course length for CEU consideration is 30 minutes.
2. Usually, one hour of training/education equals one CEU.
  - a. Instructional presentations that have been converted from live, face-to-face courses to recorded online courses without accompanying audio or written instruction similar to that available in the live presentation may result in reduced or denied CEUs.
3. The maximum number of credits that are awarded for a one-day program is six (6).
4. The maximum number of credits that are awarded for a two-day course is twelve (12)
  - a. No more than 6 CEUs can be awarded for any single day.
5. The maximum number of credits that are awarded for a multiple day program over two days in length is sixteen (16).
  - a. No more than 6 CEUs can be awarded for any single day.
6. If a person attends an education program accredited with CEUs within seven (7) days prior to taking and passing the NFI exam, the person may earn CEUs for that course attendance, which can be applied to that certification. Otherwise, no CEUs are awarded for coursework completed before taking and passing the NFI exam.
7. There are no retroactive CEU credits for courses/events/activities that were not approved for CEUs before attendance or completion. However, if appealed, NFI Staff will review on a case-by-case basis. The burden of proof for course content and attendance will be with the person making the request and/or the instructor/sponsor.
8. CEUs for a course can only be earned once in a certification period with the following exceptions:
  - a. A course with expirations and renewals (e.g., CPR) or that are required multiple times within a certification period by an employer or jurisdiction is eligible for CEUs each time.
  - b. A course demonstrated and declared by the instructor/sponsor to have at least 30% new content is eligible for CEUs for repeated attendance.
9. NFI reserves the right to reject applications for courses that introduce or espouse political or otherwise inappropriate subject matter.

10. When signing a CEU event attendance form, you must write legibly using the same name that is on the NFI records. NFI ID numbers must also be included for CEUs to be awarded.
11. Once approved for CEUs, courses do not have to be resubmitted unless:
  - a. The length of the course changes.
  - b. The content has changed (more than 30% has changed).

#### *B. CEU Training Event Attendance Policy*

##### 1. Sign In/Log In

Participant must indicate presence at or before the beginning of the training session:

- Sign the Attendance Sheet at **Traditional Classroom** events (instructor delivering content in person to the audience) and **Roundtable Discussion** events (organized, formal discussion group with pre-announced topic and moderator).
- Log in successfully in advance of scheduled start and answer roll call for **Live Online Training** events (courses/training sessions delivered live by instructor to remote audience via internet).
- Log in and activate session successfully for **Recorded/OnDemand Training** events (courses/training events pre-recorded or electronically stored and delivered to an individual via the internet).

#### **Attendance**

The approved course number and course date must appear on the attendance sheet submitted to NFI for CEU credit for attendees.

Participant must attend the entire CEU program from beginning to end, including meeting these requirements:

- For Traditional Classroom, Roundtable Discussion, and Live Online Training
  - Participants must not be later than 5 minutes from the start of the event.
  - Participants must not leave or take any breaks other than those given by the instructor, with the exception of 5 minute bathroom breaks.
- For OnDemand Training events
  - Total time participant spends connected to and using the programs are subject to review and approval/disapproval by the instructor/host.
  - Any test, quiz, exercises must be completed to the satisfaction of the instructor/host.

##### 2. Completion

Participants must complete the CEU program satisfactorily, including these requirements:

- For Traditional Classroom, Roundtable Discussion, and Live Online Training
  - Participants must be present at the end of the event.
  - Participants must successfully complete quizzes and/or exercises that may be required by the sponsor/instructor.
- For OnDemand Training events
  - Participants must successfully complete quizzes and/or exercises that may be required by the sponsor/instructor.
  - Participants must be able to provide verification of attendance at the course in the form of a certificate.

### *C. Hearth Industry CEU Education/Training Service*

#### 1. Industry Training

Instructors may receive credit for teaching any program approved with NFI CEUs only once within a three year certification period. The instructor is awarded the same number of CEUs that have been accredited for the course. Exception: NFI Review Course instructors may earn three (3) CEUs for teaching an NFI review course ONCE in a three year certification validation period. Three (3) CEUs each for review class (Core Knowledge, Woodburning, Gas, Pellet or Hearth Design Specialist) can be earned.

#### 2. Industry Publication

Writing and having a hearth industry paper or article published may be eligible for CEUs based on the following requirements.

- The article must:
  - pertain to the hearth industry
  - be published within the certification period
  - be at least 500 words in length.
- The author must
  - submit application for CEUs within 60 days of publication
  - submit a copy of the article with publication name, date of publication, and word count
  - submit the type of CEU category of the article (Technical; Safety, Health & Liability, Professional Development Electives)

An approved article will be awarded 1 CEU for 500-999 words and 2 CEUs for 1000 words or more. Co-authored articles will be eligible for a percentage of the CEUs based on the number of listed authors (e.g., .5 CEUs for a 500 word article listed with 2 authors). An article can only be submitted and awarded CEUs once, regardless of the number of times it is published. The maximum number of CEUs that can be attained through published articles is 6.

#### 3. CEU Education/Training Committee Work

Participation in face-to-face organized meetings whose purpose is developing hearth industry education/certification programs is eligible for CEUs under the following requirements:

- Only time spent in face to face meetings qualifies for CEUs.
- There is a daily limit of 6 CEUs (12 per meeting).
- The maximum number of CEUs that can be awarded for education/certification program development meetings is 16 in a certification period.

### *D. Tracking CEUs*

1. NFI Certified Specialists are required to keep track of their attendance/progress. To assist in this effort, NFI records and tracks proof of attendance at CEU events that is submitted to NFI by the course sponsor and/or by the Specialist. The history of submitted CEUs is available on the NFI website.
2. Should there be a discrepancy between NFI records and individual Certified Specialist records, the Certified Specialist must submit proof of attendance to gain any disputed CEUs.

Questions?



Visit the NFI website at <http://www.nficertified.org> for additional information, exam and review course sites, to purchase NFI Exams and Study Materials, and to renew certifications.

If you need more information please contact NFI:

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