Certified Technician

NETA Test Technician Certification or Other Certifications — *What's the Difference?*

by Mary R. Jordan, EdD
NETA Executive Director

The NETA office often gets inquiries from contracting officers and specifying engineers who ask, "A company says its employees are equivalent to NETA Certified Technicians because their people have certifications in [specific areas]. So, why should I specify NETA?"

This is an excellent question.

"Certification" is the popular buzz-word in all areas of life today, from massage therapists to hotel clerks to electrical testing technicians. Consumers are repeatedly told that "certified" people assure a minimum level of competence. With all the so-called "certifications" in the market-place, the term is often misrepresented, and it is easy for the consumer to be fooled. How do you know what the various titles and certifications mean and which people are truly qualified to perform work on your electrical power system equipment?

Because technical judgements are necessary, specifying competency requirements for the evaluator of electrical power equipment is as important as specifying the test procedure itself. When dealing with electrical power system testing, there are two key elements to consider: ANSI standard ANSI/NETA ETT-2000 and the National Skills Standards Board in Washington, D.C.

The ANSI Standard ANSI/NETA ETT-2000 *Standard for Certification of Electrical Testing Technicians* provides competency requirements on the basis of experience, education, and a certifying examination. This document forms the format and structure for the NETA certification process. NETA's certification requirement parallels that of the National Skills Standards Board in Washington, DC, which promulgates skill levels for various occupations.

Why Specify Certification in Accordance with ETT-2000?

There is no reason to compromise on quality personnel. While there are many "certifications" within the industry, there is only one ANSI standard relative to electrical testing technicians. And the ANSI standard is not a "NETA only" standard — anyone claiming to be equivalent to NETA can use one of the alternate paths to certification as set forth in ANSI/NETA ETT-2000. This Standard provides fairness and multiple paths to accomplish certification.

One of the alternate (parallel) paths within ETT-2000 is offered by The National Institute for Certification in Engineering Technologies (NICET). ANSI/NETA ETT-2000 also allows other accrediting agencies to evaluate and confirm expertise of persons in accordance with standard certification criteria promulgated by the United States government. Thus, requiring certification within guidelines of this ANSI standard is nonrestrictive and available to those within the certifying community, provided they meet the requirements of the standard.

Specifying someone in accordance with this standard assures the end users they have hired a trained, experienced person. Before the technician can even sit for the stringent Level III exam he or she must have accrued five years of actual field experience in electrical testing as well as a minimum of 64 hours of safety training and 400 hours of technical education. A Level IV technician must have ten years of field experience and have accrued over 100 hours of safety training and 600 hours of technical education.

How Is NETA Certification Different?

Although a technician can certify using an alternate means, NETA's certification is still more comprehensive. NETA differs from others in that it certifies the company as well as the individual; therefore, the end-user is assured of the qualifications of the company along with the over-all competence of the individual technicians.

Company certification is an important aspect and one that should not be overlooked. The process of certifying the company as well as the individual helps assure the consumer that the technician performing the electrical testing not only has the required skills from an individual's aspect, but also has the infrastructure around him to support the process of electrical power testing. Issues such as fiscal responsibility, test equipment calibration, professional engineer's support, and minimum requirements for test forms are some of the basic elements a company needs to support the certified technician in the field.

Training institutes and equipment manufacturers often advertise "certification" in specific areas. No matter what the promotional literature say, these programs provide certificates of completion and not a true certification of competency. Such "certifications" do not meet the government's definition of a qualified certification. For a technician to be truly certified, this person must meet criteria concerning work history, and education in addition to successfully completing an independently proctored examination. Most training companies offering "certification" only verify that they have observed a person performing a task and that the instructor has given an exam. A one-week training program cannot provide the experience needed for competency — that takes years of field experience.

NETA differs, too, in that its certified technicians are knowledgeable and experienced in all aspects of field service, from testing circuit breakers to identifying ground faults. Other programs offer training and certificates in more limited areas — substation maintenance or infrared testing, for example. As part of their overall education, many NETA technicians have taken these training courses and received certificates in various areas of expertise. When an end user contracts with a NETA company, he gains the advantage of the NETA Technician's wide base of knowledge and comprehensive experience and education. The NETA Certified Technician may be responsible for testing transformers but can also recognize and report to the owner other problems and issues within the power system.

New Installations – Writing Bid Specifications for Testing and Maintenance

Typically, the owner and the architect/engineer specify the electrical testing as an integral part of the construction specifications. In the past, there were no nationally-recognized qualification criteria established for electrical testing personnel — unlike that for other trades such as concrete material testing and fire alarm testing. ANSI/NETA ETT-2000 *Standard for the Certification of Electrical Testing Technicians* outlines a nationally recognized procedure for qualifying electrical testing technicians and the agencies that certify them. Inspectors and specifiers can now mandate that the electrical testing be performed by technicians certified in accordance with ANSI/NETA ETT-2000.

Suggested wording for specifying the individuals performing testing services:

Technicians performing these electrical tests and inspections shall be trained and experienced concerning the apparatus and systems being evaluated. These individuals shall be capable of conducting the tests in a safe manner and with complete knowledge of the hazards involved. They must evaluate the test data and make an informed judgment on the continued serviceability or nonserviceability of the specific equipment. Technicians shall be certified in accordance with ANSI/NETA ETT-2000, *Standard for Certification of Electrical Testing Technicians*. Each on-site crew leader shall hold a current certification, Level III or higher, in electrical testing.

In summary, when discussing the certification of electrical test technicians for your power system, be cognizant of the differences between the certifications. If the technician certification presented to you does not meet the criteria of the ANSI standard, you are probably not getting the ability to perform that is widely available to the consumer — the technician certified under the ANSI requirements.

For more information about NETA Certification or to find a NETA Full Member company in your area, please contact the NETA office: 888.300.NETA (6382) or www.netaworld.org.