

NULCA Launches Accreditation Program

INDEPENDENT REVIEW CERTIFIES LOCATOR TRAINING

/ BY GARY BOCKLEMANN

The National Utility Locating Contractors Association (NULCA), an association for underground utility locating professionals, has introduced a new accreditation program for its members. The accreditation program is designed to help regulators, utilities, facility owners, contractors and other stakeholders certify underground locating professionals through training programs that have been verified as being consistent with industry best practices by meeting NULCA's widely recognized Professional Competence Standards for Locating Technicians.



active steps to assure public safety in their surrounding communities.”

Independent Review of Training Programs

Under the new accreditation system, NULCA member training programs will be independently reviewed by NSF International Strategic Registrations (NSF-ISR), a wholly-owned subsidiary of NSF International, a global organization that writes standards, and tests and certifies products and processes in a broad range of industries related to public health and safety. To earn accreditation, members

will submit copies of all training materials, as well as documenta-

tion of their training processes and programs, for NSF-ISR review. NSF-ISR will then report to NULCA on whether the materials supplied meet the requirements set forth in the NULCA Competence Standards.

“The launch of our accreditation program represents a significant milestone, and is a proactive response to a widely recognized need in the locate industry,” said NULCA President Greg Jeffries. “Recent years have seen a growing demand from state and federal regulators, as well as from utility operators and other facility owners, for a credible process for validating the competencies of locating professionals. Our members and other stakeholders have been eager for this capability, so we listened and responded with a program that offers an effective new measure.”

Jeffries, National Senior Practice Manager for Surveying And Mapping, LLC, noted that in addition to facility owners, other stakeholders had also indicated they were eager for a way to identify qualified training programs for underground utility locators. There had been expressions of interest from the Common Ground Alliance (CGA), as well as the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), and various state and local regulators.

“We responded to this interest by developing an accreditation process that uses a qualified and objective third party to review member training materials and programs, and certify those that are found to be in compliance with the NULCA Competence Standards,” he said. “The accreditation program will help NULCA members demonstrate they meet industry standards – a fundamental requirement in many utility company requests for proposals (RFPs), and a necessity for many projects that involve federal funding or oversight,” Jeffries noted.

“Accreditation allows NULCA members to validate that they are training their technicians to meet recognized industry standards,” he added. “This, in turn, enables facility owners to demonstrate to regulators that they are not only meeting regulatory requirements, but also taking

“This independent review is essential to the accreditation process since it offers an objective, third-party assessment of each contractor's training regimen by an organization that is widely recognized for certifying health and safety programs,” said NULCA Vice President Dennis Tarosky, President of UtiliQuest/Locating Inc. He noted that NSF-ISR's experience and credibility add significant value to the NULCA accreditation process.

“NSF International has 70 years of standard development, quality, safety and environmental management experience, and is a Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization Collaborating Center on Food Safety, Water Quality and Indoor Environment,” said Tarosky. Headquartered in Ann Arbor, Michigan, NSF International today operates in more than 165 countries, providing health and safety testing services as well as third-party certification to verify compliance to regulatory specifications and published standards such as the NULCA Competence Standards.

“Rather than focusing on individual employees, the NULCA accreditation process takes a more comprehensive approach,” Tarosky explained. “This process makes it possible to verify that a contract locator has a qualified training package and process, and that it is consistently deployed. In addition, the accreditation process verifies that the trained technicians are tested to demonstrate that the knowledge they gained has been retained.”

Certification to the NULCA Competence Standards

In order to earn certification, a company or a contractor's training program

must be reviewed by NSF auditors who will verify it addresses all 10 components of the NULCA Competence Standards:

- 1) **Basic Locating Theory**
- 2) **Use of the Transmitter**
- 3) **Use of the Receiver**
- 4) **Marking Procedures**
- 5) **Knowledge of Facilities**
- 6) **Visual Observation Skills**
- 7) **Safe Work Practices and Regulations**
- 8) **One Call Regulation, Requests and Documentation**
- 9) **Excavator and Customer Relations**
- 10) **Locating Pipelines**

Once the training program's content and delivery systems have been found to be in compliance, contractors will be permitted to include their accreditation in bid packages and other business materials.

"NULCA accreditation will enable contractors to provide proof of their consistent training standards and training delivery methodology," said Jeffries. In addition to proof of NULCA compliance for RFP and RFQ requirements, it also will provide contractors with a way of demonstrating their compliance with Title 49 CFR Subparts 191, 192, 195, and 199 of the U.S. DOT Pipeline Safety Rules.

National recognition of the need for proper locator training, as well as documentation of the training, has long been endorsed by the Common Ground Alliance (CGA).

"This NULCA accreditation program validates the standard that has been recognized by the CGA Best Practices regarding qualifications of utility locators throughout the industry," said Bob Kipp, President of CGA. "The ability to identify locators who have demonstrated their companies' commitment to the highest professional standards provides stakeholders with greater assurance and enables the CGA to communicate to regulators and the public that the companies in compliance have taken proactive steps to maintain safe, cost-effective operations."

Positive Reactions from Stakeholders

The establishment of an accreditation program has been a priority of the NULCA Board of Directors for some time, according to NULCA Director Josh Hinrichs, who noted, "The final development and launch of the program was the culmination of a year-long effort involving a number of NULCA members."

Hinrichs is president of ELM Locating & Utility Services, one of several NULCA member firms that participated in a successful pilot of the accreditation process in 2015.

"That pilot helped us finalize the review and verification requirements with NSF International, and paved the way for the launch of an accreditation process that is very beneficial to the locating industry as a whole," Hinrichs said.

Initial reactions to the new program have been highly positive from various stakeholders including facility owners.

"The NULCA accreditation program fulfills a need that has long been recognized," said Marathon Pipe Line LLC Damage Prevention Supervisor Karen Byers. "As owners and operators of underground utilities in many states, as well as a member of NULCA, we look for opportunities to learn more about how our contract locators are trained. This program helps us identify locators who have demonstrated their commitment to the highest professional standards. We take our role as guardians of public safety seriously and, thanks to NULCA, we know those we contract with share this mission. Any company who employs underground utility locators, including both NULCA members and non-members alike, are being encouraged to learn more about the new accreditation program and to begin the accreditation process."

"We have seen high levels of interest from NULCA members, and we're eager to reach out to the industry at large as we continue to aim for the highest professional standards," said Jeffries. "Third-party certification provides all stakeholders – regulators, facility owners, contractors and the public at large – with assurance that locator training programs meet NULCA requirements."

Utility operators, regulators and contractors who are interested in learning more about NULCA accreditation are encouraged to visit the NULCA booth (#122), at the 2016 CGA 811 Excavation Safety Conference & Expo. They may also request additional information by contacting Ron Peterson, NULCA Executive Director, at executivedirector@nulca.org.