



AMERICAN INDOOR AIR QUALITY COUNCIL Press Release

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IAQ Council Certification: A Mark of Integrity

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At the American IAQ Council, we think of certification as both a **door** and a **bar**: a door in the sense that it welcomes people into the certification program; a bar in the sense that it only accepts those who meet its standards.

We believe that the most respected certifications have two things in common: the door is open, but the bar is high.

As an independent certifying body, the American IAQ Council has always provided the widest door and the highest bar in the indoor air quality industry.

Raising the Bar

The Council's work in "raising the bar" is well documented:

- Our certifications have always been and continue to be board-awarded by a nationwide panel of industry experts, who award certification by unanimous vote only. Certification board members volunteer their time to review each application, and remain completely independent of training organizations or other financial interests.
- Our certifications require extensive field experience from every candidate – up to **eight years** experience in the case of our most prestigious designations. IAQ Council staff members verify project documentation by phone or affidavit for every application, and maintain detailed records of verification in case of a subpoena.
- Our certification exams are delivered in a secure electronic format by independent third party proctors. This means that no one has access to IAQ Council certification exams – ever. It also means that exam topics, items, answers and distracters are randomized to protect exam security.
- Our re-certification requirements are the most stringent in the industry. IAQ Council certifications must be renewed every two years, and require up to 20 re-certification credits (RCs) per year in registered professional development activities.

In short, an IAQ Council certification is simply harder to obtain, and harder to keep, than the average "run-of-the-certification-mill" designation. This is why IAQ Council certifications are the **only** marks in the industry to earn prestigious accreditation by CESB, a nationally recognized independent accrediting body.

Third Party Accreditation

The Council for Engineering and Scientific Specialty Boards (CESB) has accredited certification programs in engineering and applied science since 1990. CESB is entirely independent of industry organizations, and exists solely to promote high standards in the certification industry.

CESB accreditation is extremely difficult to achieve. It is available only to certifying bodies who maintain rigorous standards for candidate eligibility and program operation. Accredited certifying bodies must be independent of training organizations. They must follow strict guidelines for exam development and security. They must evaluate education and field experience as well as exam performance. Such standards are the reason that CESB-accredited programs like the Certified Industrial Hygienist (CIH) are revered as marks of integrity and credibility.

The IAQ Council has achieved CESB accreditation for **eight** of its certification programs:

Indoor Environmental Consulting

Council-certified Indoor Environmental Consultant (CIEC) – 8 years experience required

Council-certified Indoor Environmentalist (CIE) – 2 years experience required

Microbial Consulting

Council-certified Microbial Consultant (CMC) – 8 years experience required

Council-certified Microbial Investigator (CMI) – 2 years experience required

Microbial Remediation

Council-certified Microbial Remediation Supervisor (CMRS) – 5 years experience required

Council-certified Microbial Remediator (CMR) – 2 years experience required

Indoor Air Quality Management

Council-certified Indoor Air Quality Manager (CIAQM) – 2 years experience required

Residential Mold Inspection

Council-certified Residential Mold Inspector (CRMI) – 2 years experience required

In compliance with CESB guidelines for accredited certifying bodies, each of these programs is administered independently of organizations that offer training and/or review leading to certification. A quick look at the industrial certification landscape will demonstrate the wisdom of this requirement.

Instant Certification

Candidates for IAQ-related certifications have grown accustomed to a familiar process: first, they take a training course from a certification body. Immediately following the course they take a certification exam administered by the trainer. The exam covers the exact same material as the course, since the trainer typically has access to exam content during course construction. By the same token, the course is usually taught “to the test,” meaning that the candidates often learn little more than how to pass the examination. If they do pass, they are automatically certified. It’s a one stop shopping experience that can turn out certified “professionals” at an alarming rate.

The problem is that such “instant” certifications attest to little more than course attendance; they don’t necessarily represent broad industry knowledge. Truth be told, since the exam is given immediately after the course, they don’t even guarantee that candidates really remember what they’ve learned. Certifications obtained this way are often inexpensive to acquire and maintain, and for good reason: their practical value is low. They are useless to the certificant when it comes to buying professional insurance, and once challenged in court by a subpoena, they often become a liability rather than an asset.

Industry Certification

In other, more established industries such as industrial hygiene, engineering, architecture, law and medicine, there is a vastly different pattern. Candidates for certification must pass a standardized exam based on a range of industry texts and administered independently of training organizations. These “industry certifications” are more difficult to acquire and often more expensive to maintain – but they are worth the investment because they have value in the marketplace. Certificate holders are respected by insurance companies as experts in their field and by juries as authorities in the courtroom.

The IAQ Council’s accreditation by CESB signals the creation of the first true “industry certifications” in indoor air quality. Because of the reputation our certifications have developed, certificants enjoy a wide range of benefits:

- They have exclusive access to the best professional liability insurance in the industry.
- They are respected in courtrooms across the country as reliable authorities on indoor air quality issues.
- They command higher wages and professional fees.

The professional world treats IAQ Council certifications as marks of distinction and expertise – thanks to our work in raising the bar.

Opening the Door

The IAQ Council’s work in “opening the door” is perhaps less well known. Since the division of labor mandated by the Unification of IESO, IAQA and the IAQ Council, we have moved consistently to increase the availability of our programs to all applicants.

- We have eliminated required preparatory courses. Eligibility for an IAQ Council certification no longer depends upon attendance at a specific training course. Anyone may sit for an IAQ Council certification exam.
- We have standardized test administration by employing a network of testing centers throughout North America. This means that candidates can schedule the exam at a time and place of their own choosing and can see exam results (including areas requiring further study) instantly upon completion of the test.
- We have created apprentice programs to welcome candidates who do not qualify for accredited IAQ Council certifications. These programs help newcomers gain the field experience necessary for certification while at the same time protecting the integrity of the certifications themselves.
- We have based our exams on readily available industry texts, which are listed on our website. This means that candidates may supplement their training by self study, or challenge the exam altogether.

- We have dramatically increased the range of professional development activities that qualify for recertification credits (RCs). From membership in an industry association or attendance at an industry convention to participation in a school-based IAQ program or taking an online reading test on industry publications, the list provides a multitude of ways for certificants to maintain their designations.
- We have expanded the reach of our certification work by presenting new programs to new areas of the market. Our Council-certified Indoor Air Quality Manager (CIAQM), for example, is designed for property and building managers whose work involves hiring IAQ professionals rather than performing IAQ services. The CIAQM program is ideal for those responsible for indoor air quality in schools, government agencies and commercial buildings.

These changes mean that everyone is welcome to join our certification programs, and that each candidate for a certification exam has access to exactly the same information and opportunities as all other candidates.

The Final Step

In a recent review of its programs, however, the IAQ Council board of directors concluded that while the bar for certification remained high, the process of opening the door was still unfinished.

Therefore, the board decided to publish a series of examination study guides which had previously been available only to select course providers.

The IAQ Council board made this decision in compliance with standards for educational testing published by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME). These standards require that exam information made available to some candidates be made available to all candidates. They caution that non-uniform distribution of study material may compromise the validity and reliability of examination results.

The IAQ Council's release of study guides brings its programs into compliance with these standards by eliminating exclusive arrangements with certain course providers and opening the door to all candidates equally.

What is a Study Guide?

The practice of publishing a study guide is common in the credentialing world. Study guides are designed to familiarize candidates with the topics covered by an exam without divulging actual exam content. This goal is usually accomplished in one of three ways: some certifying bodies publish detailed topic lists or core skills; others publish sample questions, including actual questions from previous editions of the exam; still others publish sections of the reference texts which deal with examination topics.

IAQ Council Study Guides

It is the policy of the IAQ Council never to release actual examination questions or answers to anyone, for any reason. The IAQ Council board therefore decided to provide exam guidance via the other two methods. IAQ Council study guides contain exam topic lists and/or reference text page numbers from which exam items may be drawn.

Page numbers actually reveal no specific information about exam questions. Each page in a reference text may deal with a variety of topics that could be the source of multiple exam questions. Topics addressed on a single page may be informed by previous pages and extend to subsequent

pages. Additionally, these exam topics may be addressed in a different context in other areas of the reference text.

The IAQ Council certification boards have also incorporated distracters into each exam item that force a candidate to draw upon comprehensive knowledge of the reference texts. Studying the listed sections or page numbers alone is not adequate preparation for the exam. For this reason, it is still highly recommended that candidates for certification attend a study/review course prior to the test.

IAQ Council study guides are designed to help candidates in this process as well. Candidates may use the guides as a standard by which to judge the quality of certification study/review courses and to evaluate whether the courses have prepared them adequately for the exam. We believe this will increase the quality and uniformity of certification preparation across the IAQ industry.

With the publication of exam study guides, the process of “opening the door” is complete. Our industry designations now possess all the essential qualities of the most prestigious certifications: they are available to all candidates equally, but also enforce a high standard of knowledge, experience and continued professional development.

Honoring Our Commitments

As a Unification partner, the American IAQ Council is charged with creating and maintaining the finest certifications in indoor air quality. We believe three values are crucial to achieving this goal: integrity, credibility and independence.

As we have done since long before Unification, we continue to stand firmly behind our commitments to these values. We have maintained the integrity of our program operations at all levels; we have established and enhanced the credibility of our certifications in the marketplace; we have protected the independence of our organization.

You can be sure we will continue to honor these commitments in the years to come, and that IAQ Council certifications will continue to distinguish true professionals.

Charlie Wiles is the current executive director of the American Indoor Air Quality Council, and has more than 35 years experience in the field of indoor air quality. He is the founder of Metro Environmental Company in Phoenix, Arizona and has served as an IAQ consultant for major corporations throughout the United States. He is the inventor and holds the Federal trademark for the WallChek™ interstitial sampling device. Mr. Wiles has written numerous articles on IAQ topics ranging from ventilation and sampling protocols to risk management and certification.