

HRAI Re-affirms Support for Gas Technician Apprenticeship Program in Ontario

On December 12th, HRAI Contractors Division Chair Peter Steffes and HRAI Director, Programs and Relations Martin Luymes participated in a meeting convened to "engage the HVAC industry on the issues, considerations and impacts of having two regulators should the trade of Gas Technician be named an apprenticeship trade under the Ontario College of Trades and Apprenticeship Act, 2009". This meeting was hosted by the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA), the Ontario College of Trades (OCOT), the Ministry of Consumer Services (which is responsible for the oversight of the Technical Standards and Safety Act, 2000), and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (which is responsible for the oversight of the Ontario College of Trades and Apprenticeship Act, 2009).

The Gas Technician is regulated as a compulsory certification by TSSA. As readers will know, HRAI fought since 2003 for the establishment of an apprenticeship program to support this certification, because this form of field based training is seen by most contractors as a superior form of training new employees. An apprenticeship program was finally established more than two years ago by MTCU, in co-operation with TSSA, but it has not been promoted to industry in any meaningful way. The complication arose with the creation of the Ontario College of Trades, because any apprenticeship program (whether compulsory or voluntary) became part of their jurisdiction under new legislation. The OCOT believes that, if it assumes responsibility for an apprenticeship program under its regulations, it must also issue a Certificate of Qualification (CofQ), which would be a duplication of the CofQ issued by TSSA. Meanwhile, under its own act and regulations, TSSA is not in a position to give up responsibility for issuing and enforcing Gas Technician certificates.

For the past year, TSSA and the Ontario College of Trades have been holding discussions to determine if Gas Technician should be named as an apprenticeship trade under OCOT (which would lead to the duplication problem). By December, it appeared that the government, as well as TSSA and OCOT had come to an impasse and were prepared to simply abandon the Gas Technician apprenticeship program as unworkable under the current rules.

However, a strong response from HRAI, as well as some other industry representatives, suggested that TSSA and OCOT should not give up on finding a way to make the program work. Mr. Luymes proposed that the OCOT, with the support of the Ministry, should work towards a regulatory change (or perhaps a re-interpretation of its regulations) to allow it to recognize pre-existing certifications where appropriate (such as those issued by TSSA) as satisfying the requirement for a Cof Q. This would mean that OCOT could issue Certificates of Apprenticeship for those who opt into the gas technician apprenticeship program, while TSSA would ultimately issue the CofQ (as it does now). OCOT recognition of this TSSA-issued CofQ would actually strengthen the power of that certification as it would be recognized (and promoted) by two regulatory bodies.

As a result of this feedback, TSSA and OCOT agreed to try again towards a resolution in the new year that will meet the needs of the industry.

For more information, contact Martin Luymes at 1-800-267-2231 ext. 235, or e-mail mluymes@hrai.ca.