

CANADIAN HOME INSPECTORS

NATIONAL CERTIFICATION

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Is There a Need for a National Credential?.....A Case for Adopting the NCP as the Common Standard for Certifying and Licensing Canadian Home Inspectors.

Many home inspectors wonder why the National Certification Program exists, creating two or more similar but different credentials in some jurisdictions. Often in our travels and inspection discussions we are asked many questions about this, such as: Is one better than the other? Why do we really need more than one?

To start with we will use what was deemed the logical starting point..... CMHC, HRSDC and other stakeholders looked to the industry some 15 years ago to resolve a number of concerns within the "home inspection" sector. In November of 1996, representative members of the home inspection profession in Canada convened a meeting in Toronto to develop a long term "national" strategy for the profession. The finds resulted in a "rationale for change" which would be coordinated through a "national initiative." Some necessary actions included a look at the current scenario, long term goals and the expected benefits to the profession. The report was issued in June 1997.

Through these deliberations, the report identified a few key points that included:

1. Fragmentation within the profession.
2. Existing associations do not represent the entire home inspection sector.
3. There was no mechanism in place allowing the different groups to work together towards achieving a common goal.
4. Create a system to develop national standards for industry regulation, standards of performance for training and base qualifications for individuals entering the profession.

The steering committee indicated "we believe that unifying the profession around common goals is desired not only by members of the profession, but also by a host of stakeholders in the Canadian housing and financing community. We believe that the profession is capable of coalescing around a common strategy and that the merits of accomplishing that strategy will provide significant benefits to all."

This vision not only forged the creation of the Canadian Home Inspectors and Building Officials (CHIBO) Steering Committee, but later resulted in the formation of the National Certification Program. (NCP) The organizational objectives identified included:

1. To elevate the status of the profession in the minds of the consumer, home inspectors, government and key stakeholders across Canada.
2. To establish one recognized body speaking on behalf of the Canadian private sector home inspection profession at the national level.
3. To establish performance standards for home inspections, a code of ethics and criteria for inspector certification that will give the general public confidence that all home inspectors have met the requirements of the national certification process.
4. To ensure that inspections comply with that standard throughout Canada.
5. To approve, support and coordinate provincial/regional accrediting agencies to administer, certify and provide disciplinary control of private-sector home inspectors.

The implementation of the (NCP) occurred in 2006 after successful completion of the committee work and an exhaustive Pilot Project. The vast majority of concerns noted were met. As such the NCP is self-funded by applicant members and National Home Inspectors. (NHI) It is governed by the NHICC - National Home Inspector Certification Council.

1

The NHICC leadership is entirely comprised of National Home Inspectors (largely former NCH – National Certificate Holders). The creation and continuation of the NCP is supported by a good number of stakeholders across the country. (Inspection franchises, many training institutions, some government agencies, all CAHPI provincial associations, and some independent associations have at one time all recognized and ratified the NCP, its philosophies and its procedures)

The announcements and recognition of the National Certification Program - National Home Inspector as one of the organizations accepted for licensing in both British Columbia and Alberta is a positive indicator that there is significance to the credential. (The NHI is the only credential that has been approved in both provinces)

In order for an inspector to obtain their National Certificate, an applicant needs to complete a significant amount of classroom and field training - and they also need to complete, among other things, a minimum of one year as a practicing home inspector and 150 fee-paid inspections. In addition, a key assessment tool utilized is the Test Inspection with Peer Review (TIPR). This process provides a means to ensure that the inspector is demonstratively competent in performing a home inspection and furthermore that he/she can provide a clearly written inspection report that meets the required standards. Clearly, the National Home Inspector level is not something that should be professed as an entry level, since you have to be an experienced home inspector and successfully complete a TIPR before you can obtain it.

There are a few other credentials available to inspectors in Canada, although most are provincially based and all, except the NHI, require membership in a particular association. The NHI is also the only credential that was developed over several years through intense consultation and cooperation with stakeholders from within and outside the industry.

As an example, the Registered Home Inspector (RHI) designation is the well-known and common certification mark used by CAHPI associations across the country. That is where much of the commonality of the RHI stops.

Each CAHPI association has a uniquely different set of certification standards for a member inspector to achieve the provincial RHI certification. This is based on expectation and largely without outside expertise. Each province established functional metrics for benchmarking their own effective certification criteria. However, those functional metrics can be challenged if independently reviewed, particularly where the association not only sets the benchmarks and certifies, but also offers education that impacts certification.

“The certifying program must show that the governance structure, policies, and procedures that have been established protect against undue influence that could compromise the integrity of the certification process.”

“To avoid conflicts of interest between certification and education functions, the certification agency must not also be responsible for accreditation of educational or training programs or courses of study leading to the certification.”²

¹ Originally the governing body was the National Certification Authority, which was essentially an arm of CAHPI. In 2009, CAHPI decided to disband the NCA and cease operation of the NCP. The NHICC was then formed by former members of the NCA who resurrected the program and obtained the right to administer and promote it from the program owners and benefactors, CSC, CMHC and HRSDC. The original designation (NCH) was replaced with (NHI)

On the other hand the NCP spent approximately a year in developing and completing those "in working condition metrics" - the DACUM of what are known as the "National Occupation Standards" (NOS) for Home and Property Inspectors. This was completed utilizing outside consultants and shared expertise from across the country. In fact a set of common core competencies are also shared between Canadian home inspectors and building officials - hence the acronym - CHIBO was also developed.

This now means that an independent national certification organization (NHICC) needs to and is able to deliver a recognized standard for benchmarking home inspection abilities on which all consumers can depend. In order to ensure an adequate number of training institutions are available to applicants, the NHICC has a National Accreditation Council in place to evaluate training programs and compare them to the NOS. The certification program must be structured and governed in ways that are appropriate for the profession, occupation, role, or skill, and that ensure autonomy in decision making over essential certification activities.

Training providers who are accredited by the NHICC need to offer academic and practical experiences in their offerings to assure that their home inspector training provides learning outcomes that develop the requisite skills for conducting a successful home inspection. As an educator that means developing or redesigning courses for home inspectors that at least meet the National Occupational Standards. The NOS identifies certain job tasks and skills that have been identified as important, by an accurate job-task analysis.

To our knowledge, no other Canadian home inspection organization has performed such exhaustive accreditation evaluations. The NHICC also requires accredited institutions to submit to annual renewals and reviews (at a cost to the institution). The key thing to note here is that standardized assessment does not necessarily reveal whether the candidate can apply what is being regurgitated to actual job processes and onsite practical applications.

Additionally, new entrants into this field should not be fooled by the hype that certain education and training offerings are truly recognized and accredited. Unfortunately some get caught up in only partially preparing for the real job at hand.

Chances are very high that some candidates will not be able to meet even the nationally recognized certification standard. This brings us to another vital tool (referred to earlier) that the NCP developed and originated in Canada: the Test Inspection with Peer Review -TIPR). The NHICC version of the TIPR (there are now several imitators) follows a very stringent protocol involving 'teams' of experienced, trained examiners.

One other very valuable item in the NHICC toolkit is the NHICC National Examination. This exam was recently instituted to ensure that the NCP was being delivered as prescribed in the CHIBO documents. In other words, the requirements of the program have become slightly more stringent each year to eventually conform to the final goals of the program authors. The NHICC National Exam is used to ensure that any possible gaps in education and training can be identified before a person can become an NHI. As of 2011, all applicants are required to pass the NHICC National Examination with a mark of 80% or higher.

In order to hire the right home inspector, consumers should also consider inquiring about who has actually inspected (validated) the inspector and who has independently validated the reporting and accuracy assessment skills of the inspector. Therein lays the role and value of completing a TIPR - scrutinizing the practical skills required of a home inspector.

The National Certification Program was a system designed to create a defensible set of standards for the competency of a home inspector across Canada. Those standards include education, field training, experience, and a demonstration of competency (reporting and inspecting).

Consider the NCP as a toolkit, if you will. It was developed at the request of all of the CAHPI member bodies, some other home inspection associations, individual inspectors, franchises, educators and some other very interested outside stakeholders. Why not use it? Why rely on a process that was built on the content that was available on the market twenty years ago?

We are not criticizing its value through the 1990's, and unquestionably there have been changes that have updated things somewhat, but after almost 20 years, it makes sense to look at the latest advancements (which we, inspectors and taxpayers, asked and paid for) to see if we can take advantage of them.

- Imagine the existing path to the PHPI, RHI, CHI, CMI etc.: Someone wants to become a home inspector and become a PHPI, RHI, CHI, CMI etc. In order to get one of those designations now, they have to go through a process that only a very few understand properly, involving a bunch of courses from various suppliers, which may vary in content and rigor depending on a wide variety of options. Most people, even those closely involved with these programs can't see it clearly. Each individual has to submit their background and courses to a committee of volunteers who have to individually assess each person's background and determine where they fit into the process.
- Now imagine a simpler process..... Someone wants to become a home inspector and become a PHPI, RHI, CHI, CMI etc. How about this.....tell them that they have to send in their application form and their cheque to the association of their choice and they can become an Applicant Member.
 - When they submit proof that they are a Candidate in the NCP, they can become an Associate Member of PHPIC, CAHPI, iNACHI, BCIPI, CanNACHI, etc. (Choose your association)
 - When they submit their National Certificate, they can become a fully certified member in any association.
 - This would also allow individuals to qualify for full membership in more than one association with only one review, which is the desire of some people.
 - Each association has the option to offer supplemental credentials on top of the NHI, which could make membership in their organization more valuable.

The NCP has an Accreditation Council with representation from all Canadian regions, and its mandate is to study course offerings and determine whether they meet part or all of the requirements of the National Occupational Standards. The work of this Council makes it very simple for provincial and other associations to accept "recognized" training providers and their courses. It simplifies their own work and places it into the hands of an objective third party.

Recognized benchmarks of provincial validation must not only rest on the laurels of meeting antiquated psychometric testing standards, they must also rise above what is identified as traditional assessment methodologies. The goal should be to set new standards for providing bona fide benchmarks of ability. If experience coupled with knowledge and ability to perform are the keys, what truly should be recognized as the standard that is provided by the certifications you earn? To accomplish accurate benchmarking, certification programs need to look at testing on-the-job experience, not just pieces of it or terms about it.

As home inspector certification and testing is brought to a new level of legitimacy with widespread adoption of performance-based models by the inspection sector, more than one credential will in our opinion collectively serve as the definitive benchmarks. Equally those entering the profession will need to make sure that the education programs they choose will be recognized, and additionally provide them with hands-on experience, along with the required

academics, when preparing for certification. These are all critical elements that must be considered to properly prepare for performing the actual job.

At least for the next while there will be a need for multiple credentials to exist, in mutual respect and reciprocal value to all home inspectors practicing in Canada. However, and perhaps even more critical, is the need for consumers and others to be able to readily compare home inspectors to a common standard from coast to coast, and especially within any one province.

We submit that universal acceptance of the National Certification Program as delivered and administered by the NHICC is a sensible, rigorous, and defensible alternative to the strife, chaos, misunderstandings and fractures that exist within the industry today.