

NABCEP Small Wind Installer Certification

By MICK SAGRILLO

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About a year ago, the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP) rolled out the first Small Wind Installer Certification (SWI) exam. This credential was six years in the making. Dozens of small-wind installers worked to develop the job task analysis (JTA), the requirements to sit for the exam, the exam resource guide, and the actual exam. The Small Wind Installer Certification parallels the photovoltaic installer and the solar thermal installer certifications, yet few in the small-wind industry are aware that it exists.

Requirements to Sit for the Exam

The NABCEP SWI certification covers all manner of wind turbines and towers with an upper limit of 100 kilowatts in nameplate turbine capacity. The exam and certification covers all end uses for small wind, from single- and three-phase installations to battery-charging off-grid applications.

An installer can follow a number of paths to qualify for the SWI exam, all requiring a minimum amount of training and real-world experience. Applicants can qualify as contractors, through apprenticeship programs, as graduates of an accredited institution of higher learning, by

taking workshops or as seasoned small-wind professionals or trainers. The requirements to sit for the SWI exam can be found at bit.ly/nabcepsmallwind. Regardless of the training pathway, all applicants must have had a responsible role in at least four wind installations during the preceding four years.

This past spring, NABCEP expanded on the SWI installer certification by delineating three different levels of certification. The installation experience requirements are designed to include a wide variety of turbine sizes as well as tower types and heights.

- Level 3, the highest level and the one most difficult to achieve, requires that at least two installations be on 80-foot or taller towers. Of these, one must be a crane

installation and one must be a tilt-up tower. In addition, two of the four installations must have rotors at least 11.5 feet (3.5 meters) in diameter or at least 100 square feet (9.3 square meters) of swept area.

- Level 2 is the same as Level 3 with the deletion of the requirement for a tilt-up tower installation. This was done because some of the manufacturers of the larger capacity small wind turbines do not offer such a tilt-up tower option.
- Level 1 is the same as Level 3 but with no minimum rotor diameter, swept-area or tower-height requirements.

The three levels are intended to be broad enough to cover the experiences of nearly any small wind installer. In addition to tower and turbine requirements, all levels require that at least two of the four installations must have been in operation for a minimum of one year.

The lengthy application for the SWI exam takes time to complete. In addition to documenting work experience and training, an applicant needs to provide a good deal of information about the four required installations.

The SWI exam is intended to test an installer's understanding of what is involved in a successful wind installation. It covers the core competencies delineated in the SWI JTA. The JTA was developed by a committee of installers and reviewed by dozens of stakeholders from the small-wind industry to assure its completeness and relevance (see bit.ly/smallwindjta). A SWI resource guide, covering material that any SWI should be intimately familiar with, is available at bit.ly/swiguide.

Why Bother?

So, why would a practicing small-wind installer go through all this? Good question!

Professional certification separates the wheat from the chaff. A certification does not guarantee competence, although it is usually assumed that anyone who has successfully applied and then passed the exam is indeed qualified for what they claim to do.

Potential customers often shop for a contractor based on the bottom line only. Achieving NABCEP SWI certification is a great way for an installer to rise above the ever-growing field of people who claim competence but who have little or no practical knowledge or installation experience. Public benefits program administrators are increasingly looking for NABCEP SWI certification as a way of ensuring that installers doing the work know their stuff.

So, small wind installers, what are you waiting for? The next deadline for application is Jan. 13, for the March 24 Small Wind Installers Certification exam. All of the links you need are above. I know it's the busy season, but get started now! **ST**



GARY HARCOURT/GREAT ROCK WINDPOWER

To qualify for the NABCEP small-wind exam, an installer must have completed at least one crane installation.