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DATE: June 8, 2020

TO: Illinois State Board of Plumbing Examiners

FROM: Brian W. Cox, P.E., Manager, Plumbing & Water Quality Program

SUBJECT: Illinois State Board of Plumbing Examiners Meeting Minutes – June 3, 2020

Attendance and Meeting Location

The meeting began at 1:05 p.m. on June 3, 2020 via Cisco WebEx. Registration address: <https://illinois.webex.com/illinois/onstage/g.php?MTID=e8dad421484d0feff520aec18d6c3784>

Dial-In Information:
Telephone: 1-415-655-0002
Event Number (access code): 133 141 6130
Event Password: IDPHPLUMBING

The following were in attendance:

IDPH Staff

Brian W. Cox, P.E., Manager, Plumbing & Water Quality Program
Rhonda Hawkins-Jackson, Plumbing & Water Quality Program
Darrah Dunlap, Plumbing & Water Quality Program
Tina Cordova, Plumbing & Water Quality Program

Examining Board Members

Robert Schafer, Chairman
Timothy Atkisson
James Brinkman
Robert Dennison
Thad Ellet
Doug Pursell
Phil Roknich

Guests

Andy Fuchs – Springfield Plumbers & Steamfitters

Welcome and Introductions

Robert Schafer introduced himself and welcomed everyone. A roll call was performed, and quorum established.

Motions

- A motion was made by Phil Roknich to approve the June 3, 2020 meeting agenda and seconded by Thad Ellet.

The motion carried by a unanimous voice vote.

- A motion was made by Robert Dennison to approve the January 14, 2020 meeting minutes and seconded by James Brinkman.

The motion carried by a unanimous voice vote.

- A motion was made by Phil Roknich to approve COVID Exam Procedures and additional 2020 exam dates of July 14, 15, and 16 with two exams each day (one in the a.m. and a second in the p.m.) with maximum of twenty-five examinees each exam; and seconded by Thad Ellet.

The motion carried by a unanimous voice vote.

- A motion was made by Thad Ellet to approve Continuing Education – Electronic CE Option Course/Sponsor Requirements with the approval of a maximum two-year maximum period allowing for evaluation of the process and seconded by Robert Dennison.

The motion carried by a unanimous voice vote.

Discussion Items

- Robert Schafer opened the floor for public comment; no public comment.
- March and June plumbing exams were cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. All meeting scheduled in March and June for examinees and sponsors to see the Board to discuss failed exams will be rescheduled at a later date and time.
- Brian Cox provided the following IDPH Plumbing and Water Quality Program Updates and Announcements:
 - Licensure –
 - Many IDPH staff have been reassigned to assist with the Department's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, licenses are currently not being processed. Program staff are focused on responding to phone calls and emails and ensuring applications submitted are complete. Once staff are able to return to work on a more frequent basis, processing of licenses will resume.
 - Governor Pritzker issued an Executive Order in response to COVID-19 which suspended portions of the Illinois Plumbing License Law including suspending the April 30, 2020 plumbing license renewal deadline, the 72 month maximum apprenticeship, and the requirement to host a plumbing exam every 3 months.
 - IDPH proposed an emergency rulemaking to the Illinois Plumbing Licensing Code in response to Governor JB Pritzker's Gubernatorial Disaster Proclamations issued during 2020 related to COVID-19. JCAR approved the emergency rules on April 2, 2020 with an effective

date of March 31, 2020. Emergency rules were adopted to delay license renewals and all renewal requirements including continuing education for plumbers, apprentice plumbers, and certified plumbing inspectors until August 28, 2020.

- Counting Education – Many plumbers still need CE hours and have not been able to obtain required CE hours due to restrictions resulting from COVID-19. Even as restrictions are lifted many individuals may choose to avoid large gatherings making it difficult to obtain the required CE courses. The Plumbing License Law and the Plumbing Licensing Code do not specify a requirement for in-person CE. The Department believes its necessary to make an electronic/online CE option available for CE course sponsors. IDPH is seeking the Board’s approval and input regarding what requirements are necessary for the approval of electronic/online CE courses.
 - May 13, 2020 the Guidance for Maintaining Water Systems During Reduced Use and Returning Water Systems to Regular Use after Extended Periods of Reduced Use was distributed as guidance to Building Owners and Operators and Water Supply Operators to reduce potential plumbing and water quality concerns caused by limited water use caused by business closures due to COVID-19.
- Brian Cox commented on the inquiry of when/if Plumbing and Water Quality Inspectors are beginning to complete inspections. Inspectors have been given the ‘green light’ to perform inspections at healthcare facilities and projects intended to increase the State’s capacity for COVID response, including projects intended to support supply chain deficiencies. Additionally, limited inspections which may be performed while maintaining social distancing and following other IDPH guidelines may be performed at other facilities (e.g. underground inspections). Inspectors may be back in the field on a more routine basis as early as June 8, 2020, but situation is fluid and IDPH plumbing inspectors will follow any new guidelines issued by the Governor or Director’s offices.
 - COVID Exam Procedures
 - All examinees and exam administrators will be required to wear a facemask throughout the exam and maintain social distancing as much as possible.
 - Board members were asked if they would feel comfortable administrating an exam while wearing a mask and complying with social distancing, all were comfortable with the restrictions.
 - Based on the dimensions of the shop and classroom at the exam site, it was determined that twenty-five examinees could participate in the exam at the same time while maintaining adequate social distancing in all portions of the exam (written/charts and practical).
 - To help eliminate overcrowding and still get fifty examinees to complete one exam, IDPH suggested establishing time limits for each portion of the exam to ensure group size in each portion of the exam (written/charts and practical) are controlled. Board members disagreed with establishing timelines for each portion of the exam, they prefer to maintain existing procedure of allowing the examinee to choose how to allocate their five-hour time limit to complete all portions of the exam as needed. All parties agreed that a maximum of twenty-five examinees would be allowed to take one exam.
 - In order to reduce the number of examinees in the queue due to the last four exams (March 24, March 25, June 9, & June 10) being cancelled three

additional exam dates were set. Holding two complete exams on each date (one in the a.m. and a second in the p.m.) with maximum of twenty-five examinees per each exam; allowing up to fifty each day. Dates set were July 14, 15, and 16, 2020; exam check-in for the a.m. exam will begin at 6:30 a.m., starting exam at 7:00 a.m.; exam check-in for the p.m. exam will begin at 12:30 p.m., starting exam at 1:00 p.m. This will allow 150 examinees the opportunity to take the exam over a three-day period.

- Examinees whom were previously scheduled for the March 24 and 25 exams will be scheduled first.
 - A letter will be sent to examinees informing them of the modified exam procedures. If they are not comfortable taking the exam with the modified procedures, they will be placed in a later exam date.
 - In an effort to further reduce the numbers of individuals present, there will not be any IDPH plumbing inspectors assisting with the exams.
 - All cast iron components supplied by IDPH along with written/chart exam stations will be sanitized before each exam to ensure the safety of the examinees.
 - Examinees will be at least six feet apart during all portion of the exam, this includes check-in where disposable paper labels will be utilized for examinee number assignment. Signage will be posted throughout the exam site as reminders for social distancing.
 - The remaining exam dates scheduled for August 4, August 5, October 27, and October 28 will remain.
- Continuing Education – Electronic CE Option Course/Sponsor Requirements – needed during this renewal term, over 1,000 plumbers still need to complete for the 2020-2021 renewal term.
 - Nothing in Plumbing License Law or Plumber Licensing Code requires continuing education to occur in-person or prohibits electronic/online CE. However, electronic/online CE has not been approved in the past by the Program. IDPH is seeking approval from the Plumbing Code Advisory Council (PCAC) and Board of Plumbing Examiners. IDPH believes it's necessary at this time to allow for electronic/online CE options while restrictions are in place but sees benefits of utilizing this option even after COVID-19 restrictions are no longer in place.
 - The PCAC unanimously approved electronic/online CE options with restrictions.
 - Open discussions of concern with the attendee learning and being engaged with the continuing education course. Some board members are not impressed with online continuing education courses they have taken from other states that do not have a protocol for establishing engagement and measuring knowledge obtained.
 - IDPH countered that many attendees at in-person CE courses are not engaged as they may be on phones, nodding off, or conversing with others. Additionally, IPDH staff receive complaints about licensees being dissatisfied with in-person CE events being sales pitches or lacking information. IDPH acknowledged concerns about verification of who is taking the course, but noted many other professions require a college degree which can be obtained completely on-line. Many other licensed professionals in Illinois allow for online CE as well. The IDPH Plumbing and Water Quality Program would like to establish parameters necessary for the approval of electronic/online courses.

- Thad Ellet suggested sessions/courses be only one-hour with a required percentage of questions answered correctly to establish knowledge obtained.
- The Program is proposing the following requirements to receive Department approval of an electronic/online CE course:
 - Tracking of registration by email including attendees name, address, license identification number.
 - Confirmation of participation
 - Course content still must meet requirements of Plumber Licensing Code
 - Questions regarding course content which must be successfully completed (either dispersed throughout the course or following completion of the course)
 - Certificate of completion produced
 - Course evaluation, this will improve continuing education and assist with the evaluation/feedback of course providers/sponsors. This is imperative due to multiple complaints from attendees of in person courses where they are discouraged by the sales pitches and not finding the content applicable.
- Discussion of the short timeline to get online courses with specified requirements prepared, approved, and available for the plumbers to complete before the August 28, 2020 deadline. With COVID, it is necessary to have a way for plumbers to complete their continuing education before the deadline. The Department feels that this can be done in a timely manner and the deadline secured. Virtual/online continuing education is believed to be the best option at this time.
- In-person CE events can continue as long as they follow the most current guidelines and requirements put forth by Governor Pritzker, IDPH, CDC and local health departments.

Meeting Adjourned

Robert Dennison motioned to adjourn, seconded by Phil Roknich. Meeting was adjourned by voice vote at 2:35 p.m.