



HEATING, AIRCONDITIONING & REFRIGERATION DISTRIBUTORS INTERNATIONAL

To Recognize the Professionalism of the men and women at the wholesale counter, HARDI presents –

The Certified Counter Specialist Program



Age of Credentials

Registered nurse, teacher certificate, licensed barber, certified fraud examiner, registered architect, CPA and MCP (Microsoft Certified Professional) – the list goes on and on.

The HVACR industry has some of its own credentialing programs, such as – NATE certification, EPA certification, Professional Engineer, certified dealer, CIRO (Certified Industrial Refrigeration Operator), CAFS (Certified Air Filter Specialist) – and HARDI's Certified Counter Specialist (CCS).

Understandably, credentialing started with persons involved in public health and safety (e.g. registered nurse, registered architect). Even where no physical danger is involved, certification is used to attest to a person's qualifications to perform a specific job – say, a certified instructor.

Certification is simply a *process* that *recognizes* a person's qualifications and demonstrated knowledge as *measured* by an organization that itself is broadly recognized as the appropriate body to award certification. The Heating, Airconditioning & Refrigeration Distributors International (HARDI) is the sole organization representing the interests of wholesale distribution in the HVACR industry; and HARDI members employ over 6,800 counter and inside sales personnel.

Objectives of the HARDI Program

The incentive to establish this program is rooted in the special report – *Market Center Distribution* written by former association president James Trusdell, in which highly trained personnel were identified as an integral part of a modern information-based wholesale distributor. (See sidebar.)

HARDI's Education Committee offers the following broadly-based objectives of the Counter person recognition program:



- To establish industry-recognized standards of performance, education and training for the counter position in HVACR distribution.
- To encourage training and education, as well as practical experience, among counter personnel.
- To demonstrate to customers and suppliers the importance of Market Center Distribution by cultivating more knowledgeable sales support personnel.
- To increase awareness among potential entry-level young people of the minimum requirements for wholesale counter sales positions.

Market Center Distribution ...

... is quite simply the integration of information technology (IT) with regionally established distribution centers, staffed and managed by *persons familiar with local markets and customers*. This model is intended to bring order and efficiency to the distribution channel by eliminating redundancies through seamless information exchange among suppliers, distributors and customers, and the use of ***appropriately trained distributor personnel***.



For the individual counter person, the program offers industry-recognized credentials useful to advance a career as well as financial enhancement. For the individual wholesale company, CCS provides the wholesaler with the opportunity to place a test-proven professional at the counter to assist the customer who may carry his own industry credentials. A competent counter person can drive down the number of returned items, use of wrong parts by the customer and reduce warranty expenses. The dealer-contractor employer appreciates decreased time wasted by his personnel at the counter and a reduction in his unapplied labor cost. Get in; get out – and with the right materials.

For most wholesaler distributors, the counter staff *is* the face of the company. Just recall almost any trade press story about a wholesaler; the counter team is invariably shown in a large photo as part of the story. Why? – Because so many customers link the counter staff with the performance of the distributor. The counter is also the most visible demonstration of the company culture.

Sales dollars generated at the counter are important to most companies' bottom line. The typical HARDI wholesaler generates \$291 per order. Processing, filling and delivering a customer order involves a large amount of expense that is the *same* regardless of the invoice size. A high profit HARDI wholesaler generates \$357 per order. Trained counter personnel are important to growing higher sales per order.

Auto Industry Led The Way

For many reasons, the automotive industry has been engaged in technician certification far longer than the HVACR industry. The Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) program quickly recognized the importance of the counter parts person to their industry's operations and introduced the ASE Certified Parts Specialist to their array of certification options.

Four-Level Recognition

For the simple reason that persons in the industry are at different stages in their career development, and compensation under a single job title quite often features a "pay range," the HARDI counter program provides four levels of recognition for specific *educational* and *training* achievements:

- *Assistant Counter Specialist (for the person starting out)*
- *Associate Counter Specialist*
- *Senior Associate Counter Specialist*
- *HARDI Certified Counter Specialist (the highest achievement)*

Criteria

The HARDI Education Committee has established minimum (mandatory) educational and training experiences for each level of recognition. These defined learning sessions are based on federal regulations

Raising The Standard In Customer Satisfaction

involving safety and hazardous materials training, plus industry credentialing for technical knowledge and skills. The latter includes NATE, RSES, NORA and other national technical certification programs. This means HARDI's accredited Home Study Institute administers training and testing focused on customer *service* and *selling* skills.

Core Competencies

Becoming a "counter pro" begins with a demonstration of being able "to carry out" core competencies deemed necessary to the job. The job, in turn, is really defined by the company for whom the individual works. Passing a core competencies "test" must therefore be conducted *on-the-job*. What are competencies?

Competencies are clusters of related knowledge, skills and attributes required to be successful in a given job.

Knowledge is information that a person has in a specific content area. For example: product knowledge or inventory management procedures.

Skill is the ability to perform a certain physical or mental task. For example: operating a forklift (physical) or problem solving (mental).

Attribute relates to characteristic and consistent response to situations. For example: patience and reliability.

The HARDI Education Committee has prepared a core competencies checklist as part of the counter program that is included in the counter recognition kit.



To Get Started

This is a HARDI Program, limited to HARDI members.

Individual counter people cannot participate directly in the program. To get started distributor company management must commit, and the first step is to assign a *Training Coordinator* (TC) to locally supervise and document each person's participation. The TC obtains a *counter recognition kit* to begin implementing the program.

To request a kit, please contact HARDI by phone 614-488-1835, fax 614-488-0482, or e-mail hardimail@hardinet.org.