

PRM-16

Certified vehicle service technicians

Every vehicle service technician in the city of Richmond, Virginia (198,000), fleet maintenance department is required to take tests developed and administered by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE). The knowledge required to pass these tests has helped the department's technicians improve their personal skills as well as the quality and efficiency of their work.

Implementation notes

Leadership/staffing The department's testing program was developed by the head of Richmond's training and quality assurance program. All of the department's approximately 40 technicians and supervisors are required to take the tests.

Timeline The program has been in place since 2000.

Budget/funding The department used to require technicians to pay for the tests and would reimburse only those who passed. But because participation was less than desired, the department now pays all fees associated with the tests, regardless of whether the technician passes. These fees include a \$31 registration fee and a \$24 fee for each regular test. Recertification tests also cost \$24 each, but ASE charges a flat \$60 for more than two of these tests.

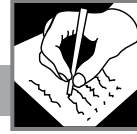
Program description Technicians and supervisors take classes, lasting one to five days, that are offered in Richmond by three major automobile manufacturers. Because the city purchases vehicles from all three manufacturers, its technicians are able to take the classes for free. The city purchased software that allows technicians and supervisors to take practice tests on the computer. ASE offers tests in several subjects, including automobile/light truck, medium/heavy truck, and parts specialist. Those who pass all of the tests are certified as master technicians. The tests are offered twice a year, and technicians are required to pass two of the tests each year. The tests are quite difficult and typically take several hours to complete. If a technician has difficulty passing the tests, the department

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offers support in the form of study guides and additional time to study. The technician's performance on the tests is now taken into account during annual evaluations. The department currently gives preference to individuals with ASE certification when it hires new technicians.

Results Currently, 82 percent of the department's technicians have at least one ASE certification, and 10 technicians and supervisors are master technicians. Because the department has at least one ASE-certified technician in each of its areas of work, it has received the ASE Blue Seal of Excellence for the second year in a row. The department has found that increased staff skill levels have increased productivity. The city's vehicles experience fewer breakdowns, and the city's internal customers recognize the high level of standards in the shop. Technicians appreciate the opportunity to enhance their skills and earn credentials that can be very helpful to their careers. The department is currently planning a career development program that will provide incentives for passing ASE tests.