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Via Email

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RE: NLCAA'S Application for Approval as a Lighting Control Acceptance Test Technician Certification Provider

Dear Director Oglesby and Mr. Commins:

These comments are submitted by PDE Total Energy Solutions regarding the National Lighting Contractors Association of America's (NLCAA) application for approval as a lighting control acceptance test technician certification provider.

Effective advanced lighting controls are a key element in meeting California's objectives in energy efficiency. Property owners and managers expect and deserve a proper return on their investment when they comply with the new Title 24 lighting regulations.

Before the 2013 update of Title 24, acceptance testing was required but the technicians were not required to have state certified training and the performance of lighting controls was inconsistent. New state certified acceptance tests on lighting controls facilitate a good return on investment when the tests are performed effectively by well qualified and well trained acceptance test technicians.

The quality, capability and experience of the acceptance test technician certification provider are essential factors in the successful and effective training and certification of acceptance test technicians. Because the 2013 Title 24 acceptance testing of lighting controls does not require a third party it is also essential that the certification program requirements and quality assurance protocols are comprehensive, rigorous, and highly reliable.

The NLCAA's application includes a number of areas that are deficient, or are lacking in information:

A. There is insufficient evidence that the NLCAA has the necessary qualifications, background or experience to effectively train and certify acceptance test technicians.

NLCAA's training program has not been reviewed or approved by lighting control manufacturers, independent subject matter experts, or California utilities.

NLCAA was founded in 2013 so it has little background, is little known, and is not a proven entity. It is not an approved apprenticeship program provider for lighting control technicians.

We believe that a provider applicant should demonstrate considerable expertise and proficiency in this type of training before it is approved by the Energy Commission. NLCAA has not demonstrated adequate experience, longevity, or expertise to operate a reliable and successful state approved certification program.

B. NLCAA's eligibility requirements for training and certification are much too low.

The NLCAA application does not indicate that NLCAA applicants meet the Energy Commission's requirement for a minimum of three years of documented experience and expertise in lighting controls and electrical systems. NLCAA does not indicate how applicants would verify their work experience. A work experience claim should be backed up with verification letters from employers or other written supporting documentation.

Energy Commission regulations include a limited number of trades or professions as having established expertise and experience in designing, installing, and testing advanced lighting controls systems: certified commissioning professionals, professional engineers, electrical contractors, certified general electricians, and controls installation and startup contractors.

The NLCAA application proposes broadening eligibility to encompass MS and BS degrees in subjects that have nothing to do with advanced lighting controls such as philosophy and geology. They also include nonresidential lighting technicians, as well as military veterans with ratings in radio, aircraft communication, radar systems and other non-lighting control related systems.

We believe that the success of the new Title 24 certification requirement rests heavily on robust eligibility requirements which require applicants to have a strong background and a minimum of three years' experience in lighting controls and electrical systems.

The NLCAA application would dilute eligibility requirements and undermine the effectiveness of acceptance testing.

C. NLCAA's testing procedures are insufficient, and they have not been validated.

The application of the NLCAA does not demonstrate adequate testing protocols or procedures and leaves many unanswered questions:

- Are there multiple versions of the exams?
- Does every exam use the same test questions?
- Are new test questions developed on a regular basis to prevent exam answers from being shared with other students?
- Are exams proctored? If so, how, and by whom?
- What is NLCAA's protocol for maintaining exam result records?
- How does NLCAA maintain exam security?
- Have NLCAA's tests been validated by independent professional exam validation experts for subject matter expertise, and for lack of race, gender and age bias?

Exam validation is essential to achieving a reliable, fair, and unbiased certification process. All providers should be required by the Energy Commission to provide documented proof of proper test procedures, strong security, and professionally validated exams.

D. As described in its application, NLCAA's quality assurance procedures and program are not adequate to provide effective oversight of acceptance testing quality and efficacy.

The NLCAA proposed 1% rate of random field inspections is much too low for a program that doesn't require acceptance test technicians to be independent third parties. Because state certified acceptance testing is a new program, a 6 to 8% rate of random field inspection would be appropriate. Furthermore, the application does not describe what penalties are imposed for a failed audit, or even what constitutes a failed audit. This information should be provided for public review and comment prior to approval of the application.

Property owners and public officials will be investing money in state mandated energy efficiency projects. They need to be able to rely on the validity of these inspections. Accordingly, it is important that the provider demonstrate a meaningful and effective quality assurance program.

We believe that the NLCAA has not shown that it has the necessary experience, qualifications, or reputation to be a capable and reliable provider of acceptance testing training and certification. Additionally, the proposed NLCAA program would not be sufficient to deliver successful and effective Title 24 lighting control acceptance test technician certification. Therefore, we oppose approval by the Energy Commission of the NLCAA application.

To a great extent, the prospective success of the 2013 Title 24 update in lighting is based on the implementation of high standards which will produce effective energy savings. We urge the Energy Commission to apply high standards to quality assurance, professional and craft eligibility standards, exam procedures, security and validation, as well as the experience, background, reputation and expertise of all certification providers.

We would like to thank the Energy Commission for the opportunity to review and comment on its lighting control acceptance test technician certification provider applications.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Best,

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Chief Executive Officer

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