AFSA45
APPRENTICESHIP REGISTRATION PLAYBOOK:
WHAT WE LEARNED
Heather Thomas & Jeff Lewis
SAN ANTONIO, TX
AFSA
American Fire Sprinkler Association

1

Heather Thomas
VSC Fire & Security
Heather Thomas is a Workforce Development Specialist at VSC Fire & Security, where she leads school outreach, internship, and registered apprenticeship initiatives designed to build the company's future workforce. Drawing on her experience as a Career and Technical Education (CTE) educator and workforce development professional, Heather is passionate about connecting students with opportunities, while supporting employees throughout their development. She focuses on creating talent pipelines, fostering employee growth, and building programs that help individuals succeed from their first introduction to the industry through apprenticeship and beyond.
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hthomas@vscfire.com | 804.774.6984

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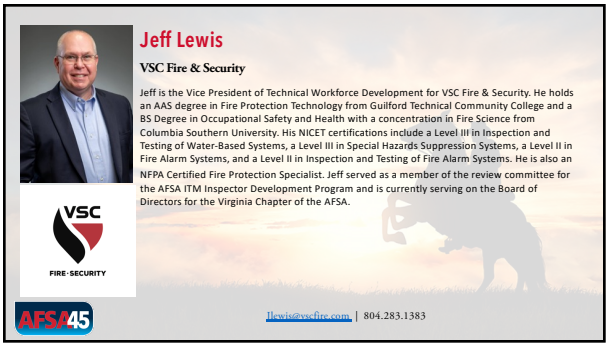
Jeff Lewis
VSC Fire & Security
Jeff is the Vice President of Technical Workforce Development for VSC Fire & Security. He holds an AAS degree in Fire Protection Technology from Guilford Technical Community College and a BS Degree in Occupational Safety and Health with a concentration in Fire Science from Columbia Southern University. His NICET certifications include a Level III in Inspection and Testing of Water-Based Systems, a Level III in Special Hazards Suppression Systems, a Level II in Fire Alarm Systems, and a Level II in Inspection and Testing of Fire Alarm Systems. He is also an NFPA Certified Fire Protection Specialist. Jeff served as a member of the review committee for the AFSA ITM Inspector Development Program and is currently serving on the Board of Directors for the Virginia Chapter of the AFSA.
VSC
FIRE·SECURITY
AFSA45
jlewis@vscfire.com | 804.283.1383

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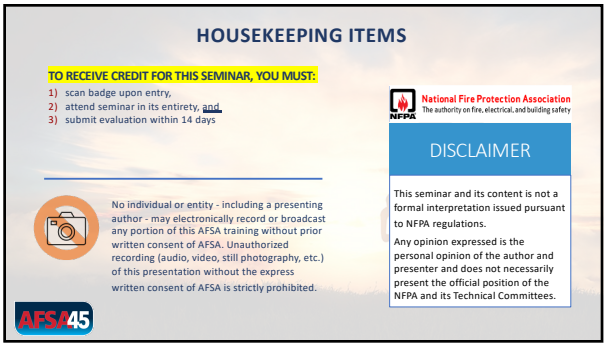
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The authority on fire, electrical, and building safety
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4

About VSC Fire & Security
Fire Protection, Life Safety, and Security Contractor
Operations across multiple states
Commitment to workforce development and long-term talent pipelines
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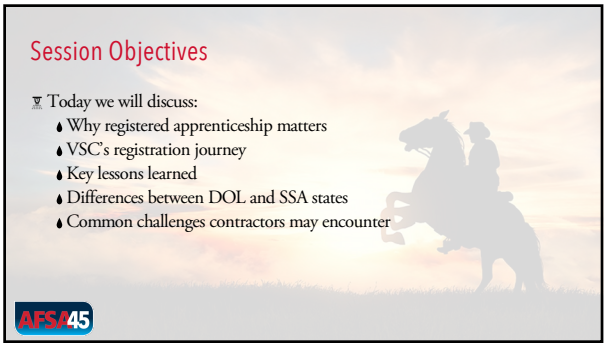
Session Objectives
Today we will discuss:
Why registered apprenticeship matters
VSC's registration journey
Key lessons learned
Differences between DOL and SSA states
Common challenges contractors may encounter
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6

Why Registered Apprenticeship?

- **Workforce Benefits**
- *Apprenticeship is a Workforce Strategy, not simply a training program*
- Registered Apprenticeship provides:
  - Structured workforce development
  - Career pathways for employees
  - Consistent training standards
  - Improved retention opportunities
  - Nationally recognized credentials

7

VSC's Goal

- **Our Objective:**
  - Expand apprenticeship registration throughout our operating footprint

Starting Point:

Three states already registered (just needed updating)

Goal: Register the program in remaining states where VSC operates

Why it Mattered:

We wanted all apprentices to have access to the same structured pathway regardless of location

8

Understanding the Apprenticeship Landscape

Office of Apprenticeship (OA) States	State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA) States
Administered by U.S. Department of Labor	Administered by state agency
Generally more standardized	State-specific requirements
Uses RAPIDS system	May use state-specific systems
Federal oversight	State oversight

9

The Importance of Establishing the Right Contacts

- Identify the right people
  - State apprenticeship consultants
  - Department of Labor (DOL) apprenticeship representatives
  - Internal stakeholders

10

The Registration Process

- Every Registration Requires
  - Progressive Wage Scale
  - On-the-Job Training
  - Related Instruction

11

Common Challenges Contractors Face

- Challenge #1: Securing an initial meeting with the state rep
- Challenge #2: Approval timelines vary widely
- Challenge #3: Different agencies may request information in different formats
- Challenge #4: SAA states use different tracking systems
- Challenge #5: Internal coordination is vital

12

Lessons Learned at VSC

- Persistence Matters – constant follow-up is necessary
- Internal Alignment Matters – know who plays a vital role in Apprenticeship
- Relationships Matter – be kind, be reliable
- Flexibility Matters – you must adapt to varying state requirements

13

What Contractors Should Consider

- Do we have leadership support?
- Do we have the resources to administer a program?
- Who will own the process internally?
- How will we track apprentice progress?
- Are we prepared for state-specific requirements?

14

Commonly Asked Questions

- Can a registered apprenticeship program be approved nationally, or must it be registered state by state?
- How long does the approval process take?
- Can one program work across multiple states?

15

State by State Progress – Fast Approvals

In June 2025, we contacted 11 states. Three (Virginia, Maryland, Arkansas) were already registered.

Alabama (Aug 5), Tennessee (Jul 23), Mississippi (Jul 23), South Carolina (Jul 24) moved quickly once documents were submitted.

16

State by State Progress – Moderate Timelines

Georgia (Aug 11), Oklahoma (Aug 14), required extra meetings or document revisions.

17

State by State Progress – Complex Cases

- North Carolina
  - Sept 12 required extra document revisions
- Texas
  - Multiple staff changes and medical leaves delayed final approval until Sept 10.
- Florida (Sept 11) & Colorado (Sept 15)
  - Longer review processes—90-day windows and mandatory webinars
- New Mexico
  - Requires a formal presentation before a state council; final review was in November. Approved in January 2026.

18

Note
Once you are registered, you have one year to get an apprentice in the program
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19

Questions?
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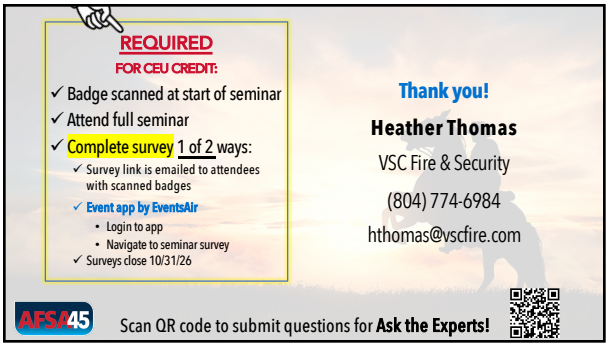
20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✓ Complete survey 1 of 2 ways:
✓ Survey link is emailed to attendees with scanned badges
✓ Event app by EventsAir
• Login to app
• Navigate to seminar survey
✓ Surveys close 10/31/26
Thank you!
Heather Thomas
VSC Fire & Security
(804) 774-6984
hthomas@vscfire.com
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Scan QR code to submit questions for Ask the Experts!

21

2027 Training Schedule

WEBINARS

1/6	Updates to NFPA 20
1/20	Calculating Pressure Reducing Hose Valves
2/3	Consumer Alert: Nitrogen in Sprinkler Systems
2/17	Reviewing Hydraulic Calculations
3/3	Updates to NFPA 13, 2028 Ed.
3/17	Updates to NFPA 13R & 13D, 2028 Eds.
4/7	Topic Coming Soon
4/21	NFPA 25: Roles & Responsibilities
5/5	Standpipe Flow Test Procedures
5/19	Storage 101
6/2	NFPA Technical Meeting - Voting Guide
6/16	Topic Coming Soon
6/30	Topic Coming Soon
7/7	Updates to NFPA 14, 2027 Edition
7/21	Adjacent Hazards & Design Methods
8/4	Acceptance Testing
8/18	Modifications to Existing Systems
9/22	Topic Coming Soon
10/6	Seismic 101
10/20	Proposed Updates to NFPA 25, 2029 Ed.
11/3	Evaluating Fire Pump Flow Tests
11/17	Top 10 Tech Reviews
12/1	Designing Water Storage Tanks
12/15	Pump Room Layout

PROGRAMS

Feb 9 - Mar 5 Apr 20 - May 14 Aug 3 - Aug 27** Oct 26 - Nov 19	Beginning Design School*
Apr 26 - May 7 Nov 1 - 12	Intermediate Design School*
Feb 8 - 10** Apr 12 - 14 Jul 12 - 14 Oct 11 - 13	Sprinkler Hydraulics Calculations Workshop
Apr 19 - 21 Oct 18 - 20	Advanced Hydraulics Calculations Workshop
Feb 11** Apr 30 Jul 23 Sep 24	Introduction to the Fire Sprinkler Industry
Mar 1 - 3 May 17 - 19 Aug 16 - 18 Oct 18 - 20**	NFPA 25 Essentials Workshop
Jun 7 - 10 Sep 20 - 23	Experienced Inspector Skills Lab
Mar 4 - 5 May 20 - 21 Aug 19 - 20 Oct 21 - 22**	NFPA 25 Fire Pump Workshop
Spring Summer Fall	ITM Inspector Development Program* *This program is 20 months.*

** Hybrid course **At General Air Products Lab, Exton, PA*

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September 8-11	Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego, CA

For More Details Visit:
firesprinkler.org

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Dates subject to change. Programs subject to minimum registrations.

rev 9/14/2026

Virtual Instruction Path (VIP)

for Sprinkler Fitting Apprentices

Level 1 - Begins January 2027

Level 2 - Begins February 2027

Level 3 - Begins January 2027

Level 4 - Begins March 2027

www.firesprinkler.org/VIP

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HANDS-ON WORKSHOPS FOR 2027

FEATURING AFSA'S TRAINING LAB

NFPA 25 Essentials Workshop

Mar | May | Aug | Oct

Description: Understand roles, responsibilities, and NFPA 25 ITM procedures through hands-on testing of wet systems, dry systems, and fire pumps.

NFPA 25 Fire Pump Workshop

Mar | May | Aug | Oct

Description: Develop practical NFPA 25 fire pump ITM skills, including no-flow and full-flow testing, water supply graphing, and performance evaluation.

Introduction to the Fire Sprinkler Industry

Feb | Apr | Jul | Sep

Description: This course is designed for those new to the industry. An introductory, wide-ranging 8-hour course that provides a broad overview of core fire sprinkler industry concepts for those new to the field.

Experienced Inspector Skills Lab NEW

Mar | Sep

Description: Take your ITM expertise beyond the basics. Designed for experienced technicians, this course combines focused classroom instruction with hands-on system lab training to strengthen your application of current NFPA 25 inspection, testing, and maintenance requirements. Refine fire sprinkler testing practices, improve documentation, deliver more consistent service, and help reduce liability while reinforcing knowledge commonly covered on certification exams.

Learn more about AFSA's fire sprinkler lab featuring functional risers, a spray room, fire pumps, and an interactive classroom.

firesprinkler.org/lab