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AN EDUCATED CONSUMER IS YOUR BEST CUSTOMER
Martin Zdrojeski
SAN ANTONIO, TX
AFSA
American Fire Sprinkler Association

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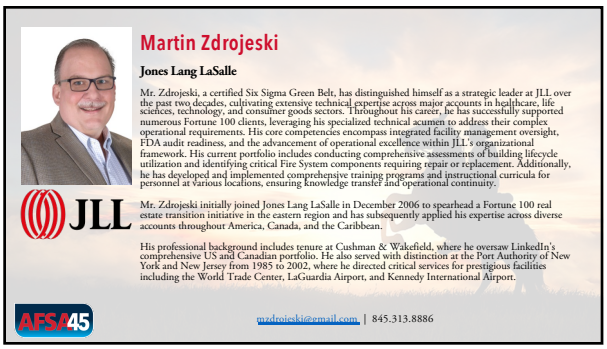
Martin Zdrojeski
Jones Lang LaSalle
Mr. Zdrojeski, a certified Six Sigma Green Belt, has distinguished himself as a strategic leader at JLL over the past two decades, cultivating extensive technical expertise across major accounts in healthcare, life sciences, technology, and consumer goods sectors. Throughout his career, he has successfully supported numerous Fortune 100 clients, leveraging his specialized technical acumen to address their complex operational requirements. His core competencies encompass integrated facility management oversight, FDA audit readiness, and the advancement of operational excellence within JLL's organizational framework. His current portfolio includes conducting comprehensive assessments of building lifecycle utilization and identifying critical Fire System components requiring repair or replacement. Additionally, he has developed and implemented comprehensive training programs and instructional curricula for personnel at various locations, ensuring knowledge transfer and operational continuity.
JLL
Mr. Zdrojeski initially joined Jones Lang LaSalle in December 2006 to spearhead a Fortune 100 real estate transition initiative in the eastern region and has subsequently applied his expertise across diverse accounts throughout America, Canada, and the Caribbean.
His professional background includes tenure at Cushman & Wakefield, where he oversaw LinkedIn's comprehensive US and Canadian portfolio. He also served with distinction at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey from 1985 to 2002, where he directed critical services for prestigious facilities including the World Trade Center, LaGuardia Airport, and Kennedy International Airport.
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National Fire Protection Association
The authority on fire, electrical, and building safety
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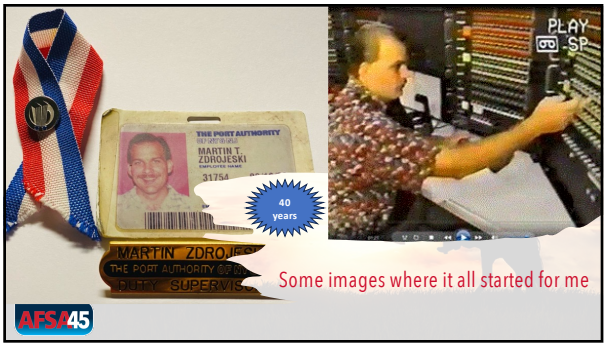
PLAY
SP
40 years
Some images where it all started for me
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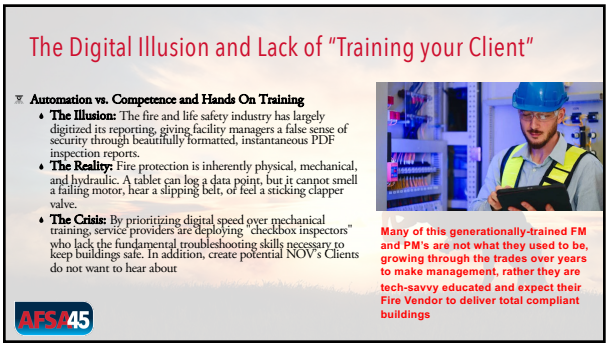
The Digital Illusion and Lack of "Training your Client"
Automation vs. Competence and Hands On Training
The Illusion: The fire and life safety industry has largely digitized its reporting, giving facility managers a false sense of security through beautifully formatted, instantaneous PDF inspection reports.
The Reality: Fire protection is inherently physical, mechanical, and hydraulic. A tablet can log a data point, but it cannot smell a failing motor, hear a slipping belt, or feel a sticking clapper valve.
The Crisis: By prioritizing digital speed over mechanical training, service providers are deploying "checkbox inspectors" who lack the fundamental troubleshooting skills necessary to keep buildings safe. In addition, create potential NOV's Clients do not want to hear about
Many of this generationally-trained FM and PM's are not what they used to be, growing through the trades over years to make management, rather they are tech-savvy educated and expect their Fire Vendor to deliver total compliant buildings
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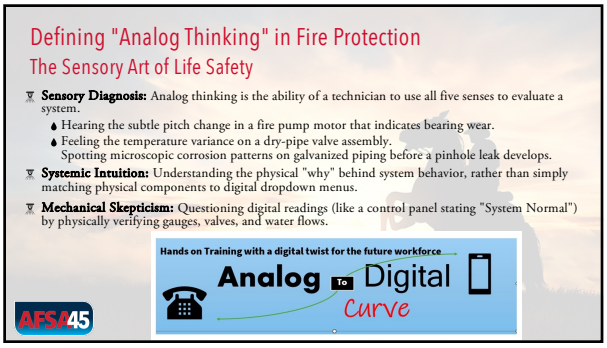
Defining "Analog Thinking" in Fire Protection
The Sensory Art of Life Safety
Sensory Diagnosis: Analog thinking is the ability of a technician to use all five senses to evaluate a system.
Hearing the subtle pitch change in a fire pump motor that indicates bearing wear.
Feeling the temperature variance on a dry-pipe valve assembly.
Spotting microscopic corrosion patterns on galvanized piping before a pinhole leak develops.
Systemic Intuition: Understanding the physical "why" behind system behavior, rather than simply matching physical components to digital dropdown menus.
Mechanical Skepticism: Questioning digital readings (like a control panel stating "System Normal") by physically verifying gauges, valves, and water flows.
Hands on Training with a digital twist for the future workforce
Analog To Digital Curve
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The Digitization of Fire & Life Safety

How We Got Here

Entry Level Staff are being trained to click a box based on Training

- **The Digital Shift:** Over the past decade, the industry rapidly adopted barcode scanning, cloud-enabled checklist apps, and automated compliance tracking.
- **The Benefits:** Streamlined administrative workflows, faster report delivery to clients, and easier scheduling.
- **The Unintended Consequence:** The technology shifted from being a tool that *supports* the technician to a system that *thinks for* the technician, leading to cognitive disengagement during physical inspections.

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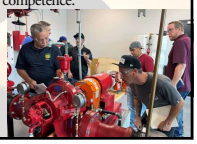
The Erosion of the Apprenticeship Model

The Loss of Hands-On Internships

- **The Old Way:** New technicians spent years shadowing master mechanics, learning through physical repetition, trial-and-error, and mechanical troubleshooting.
- **The New Way:** Accelerated onboarding programs focus on teaching technicians how to navigate the inspection app, select correct codes, and scan barcodes.
- **The Training Gap:** Technicians are sent into the field alone far too early, with their tablet acting as a digital security blanket instead of actual mechanical competence.



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The Legacy Knowledge Drain

A Looming Industry Crisis

Fire Vendors: Your Problem

- **The Retirement Wave:** The generation of technicians who grew up working on purely mechanical, pneumatic, and relay-logic fire alarm and sprinkler systems is retiring.
- **The Broken Transmission:** Because younger technicians are rarely paired with these veterans for long-term field mentorship, decades of tribal knowledge are disappearing.
- **The Future Risk:** As old-school mechanical expertise fades, the industry will struggle to maintain and troubleshoot legacy systems that still protect billions of dollars of critical infrastructure.

Facility Managers & Property Owners: Our Problem

- We expect the same level of talent we had
- We have younger and extremely smart managers that never touched tools, you are our experts we need to trust
- If your technicians are not seeing items, recommending items then we get NOV's. This generation of managers immediately will lose trust in your company

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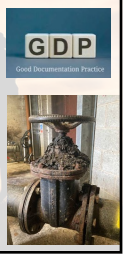
The Myth of the "Clean Scan"

Why Barcodes Do Not Equal Safety

- **The "Scan-and-Go" Culture:** Digital platforms track technician location via barcode scans. This proves the technician stood near the device, but does not prove they actually tested it.
- **Unseen Failures:** A technician can scan a tamper switch barcode on a control valve, but if they do not physically turn the valve wheel to verify the signal transmits to the panel, the test is useless.
- **Digital Complacency:** Assuming that if the app allows the inspection to be closed, the system is fully operational.



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The Financial Cost to Vendors (Part 1)

Leaving Profit on the Table

Future State training is best for all

- **Missing the Deficiencies:** An untrained technician who only checks off app prompts will walk right past highly profitable, legitimate repair opportunities because they do not know what mechanical wear looks like.
- **Unidentified Code Issues:** Failing to notice corroded hangers, pipe scale, weeping sprinkler heads, or slightly misaligned pressure switches means missing out on vital service work.
- **The Business Loss:** Every missed deficiency is high-margin repair work left behind, directly hurting the service provider's bottom line.

Hands on mentoring, Hands on Lab training, mentored walk throughs. Bridge the "Analog past to the Digital Future." Invite a client to walk and learn???

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The Financial Cost to Vendors (Part 2)

The Callback and Efficiency Drain

- **High Callback Rates:** Under-trained technicians frequently miss the root cause of system troubles, requiring expensive secondary service calls to fix the same issue twice.
- **Operational Inefficiency:** When a complex mechanical system fails, an app-reliant technician lacks the diagnostic skills to troubleshoot it quickly, leading to wasted labor hours on-site.
- **Reputational Damage:** Clients lose faith in service providers whose technicians cannot explain system failures without consulting a technical helpline or supervisor.

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Complex, SME Conversation with clients is the best start to "Educate Your Consumer"

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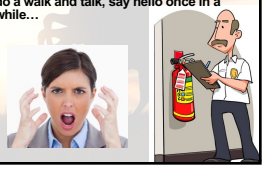
The Customer's Exposure: Notices of Violation (NOV)

The True Risk to Building Owners

- **The AHJ Intervention:** Local Fire Marshals and Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJs) do not rely on digital reports; they perform physical, eyes-on inspections.
- **The Shock of an NOV:** Building owners who received "clean" digital reports from their vendor are often blindsided when the Fire Marshal issues a Notice of Violation for obvious physical defects.
- **The Fallout:**
  - Costly emergency repair fees to resolve violations under tight deadlines.
  - Potential building closures or mandatory 24-hour fire watches.
  - Increased exposure to civil liability if a fire occurs in a compromised facility

The next generation of FM's, PM's, property owners assume to default you are their SME and if you show up all is good. Communication and expectation are critical alignment as to what you find and what is under contract. In addition, educate them, do a walk and talk, say hello once in a while…



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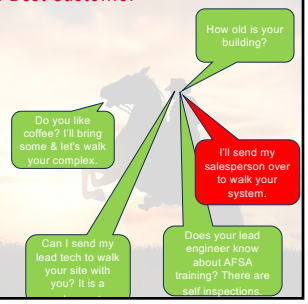
"An Educated Consumer is Your Best Customer"

The Key to Changing the Narrative

- **The Famous Business Maxim:** Coined by discount clothing pioneer Sy Syms, this phrase is highly applicable to the fire safety industry.
- **The Status Quo:** Most facility managers are not fire protection experts; they buy the cheapest inspection vendor that promises to "keep them compliant."
- **The Pivot:** We must educate building owners to understand that true compliance cannot be bought on a cheap checklist—it requires skilled, analog-minded technicians.



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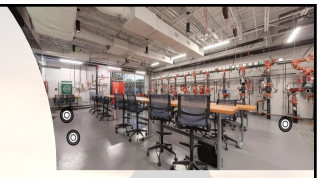
Educating the Client on True Compliance

What a Real Inspection Looks Like

- **Teaching the "Why":** Shift the client's focus from *"did we pass?"* to *"is our system actually ready to save lives?"*
- **The Value of Documentation:** Teach clients that a quality inspection report should contain detailed, narrative-style mechanical descriptions, photographs of physical wear, and proactive recommendations.
- **Demystifying the Codes:** Help clients understand that NFPA codes require physical, manipulative testing of valves, pumps, and alarms—not just visual scans.



"An Educated Consumer is Your Best Customer"

Eight eyes looking for impurities on site keeps sites in compliance and your service calls

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Demanding the "Analog" Standard

How Clients Can Hold Vendors Accountable

- **Verify Training:** Educated clients should ask to see the physical training and certification credentials of the technicians sent to their properties.
- **Ask Hard Questions:** Clients should challenge their service providers: "How did you verify this flow switch worked? Did you physically flow water, or just look at the panel?"
- **Reject the Low Bid:** When clients understand the risk of an NOV and system failure, they will stop hiring the cheapest "scan-and-go"

- Property Owner
- Landlords
- Property Managers
- Facility Managers
- Integrator Management

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The Vendor's Strategic Mistake

The Race to the Bottom

- **Commoditization:** Vendors who rely purely on digital reporting speed compete only on price, destroying their own margins.
- **Losing High-Value Clients:** Institutional clients (hospitals, data centers, high-rises) will migrate away from automated checklist vendors in favor of firms that provide true technical expertise.
- **The Ultimate Cost:** By underinvesting in hands-on training, vendors trade short-term administrative savings for long-term operational failure and lost market share.

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The Solution: The Hybrid Training Paradigm

Merging Technology with Craftsmanship

- **Digital for Administration:** Keep digital tools for what they do best—scheduling, clean record-keeping, billing, and historic tracking.
- **Analog for Execution:** Re-establish physical, hands-on diagnostic training as the primary metric of a technician's skill.
- **The Hybrid Tech:** The industry's gold standard must be a technician who possesses deep mechanical intuition and uses digital tools merely to document their physical expertise.

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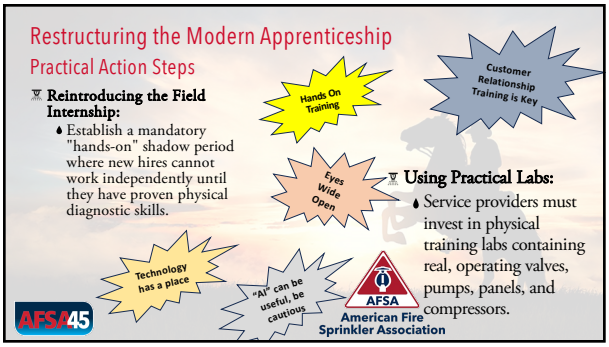
Restructuring the Modern Apprenticeship
Practical Action Steps
Reintroducing the Field Internship:
Establish a mandatory "hands-on" shadow period where new hires cannot work independently until they have proven physical diagnostic skills.
Hands On Training
Customer Relationship Training is Key
Eyes Wide Open
Technology has a place
"AI" can be useful, be cautious
Using Practical Labs:
Service providers must invest in physical training labs containing real, operating valves, pumps, panels, and compressors.
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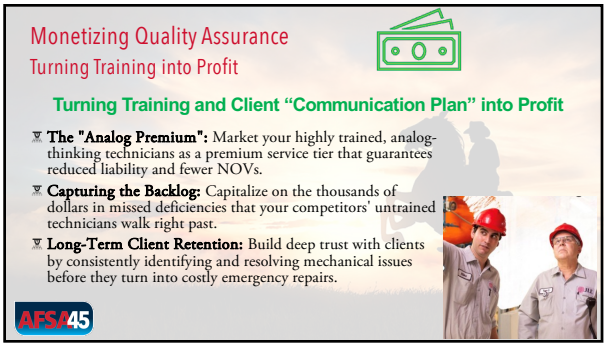
Monetizing Quality Assurance
Turning Training into Profit
Turning Training and Client "Communication Plan" into Profit
The "Analog Premium": Market your highly trained, analog-thinking technicians as a premium service tier that guarantees reduced liability and fewer NOVs.
Capturing the Backlog: Capitalize on the thousands of dollars in missed deficiencies that your competitors' untrained technicians walk right past.
Long-Term Client Retention: Build deep trust with clients by consistently identifying and resolving mechanical issues before they turn into costly emergency repairs.
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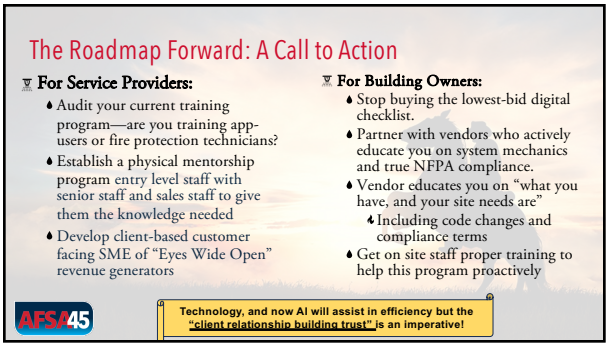
The Roadmap Forward: A Call to Action
For Service Providers:
Audit your current training program—are you training app-users or fire protection technicians?
Establish a physical mentorship program entry level staff with senior staff and sales staff to give them the knowledge needed
Develop client-based customer facing SME of "Eyes Wide Open" revenue generators
For Building Owners:
Stop buying the lowest-bid digital checklist.
Partner with vendors who actively educate you on system mechanics and true NFPA compliance.
Vendor educates you on "what you have, and your site needs are"
Including code changes and compliance terms
Get on site staff proper training to help this program proactively
Technology, and now AI will assist in efficiency but the "client relationship building trust" is an imperative!
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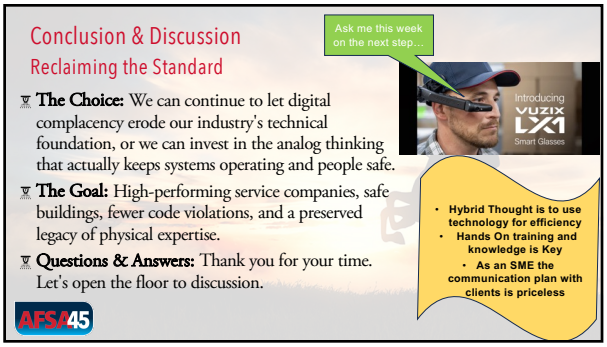
Conclusion & Discussion
Reclaiming the Standard
Ask me this week on the next step...
The Choice: We can continue to let digital complacency erode our industry's technical foundation, or we can invest in the analog thinking that actually keeps systems operating and people safe.
The Goal: High-performing service companies, safe buildings, fewer code violations, and a preserved legacy of physical expertise.
Questions & Answers: Thank you for your time. Let's open the floor to discussion.
Introducing VUZIX LX1 Smart Glasses
Hybrid Thought is to use technology for efficiency
Hands On training and knowledge is Key
As an SME the communication plan with clients is priceless
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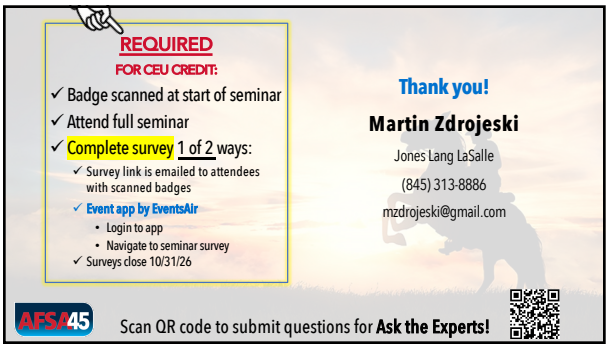
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Thank you!
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Scan QR code to submit questions for Ask the Experts!

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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