

security. Technological advances come rapidly in the air-conditioning field, and technicians who don't keep up with those advances may find themselves falling behind and becoming less valuable to their customers and their companies.

"Knowing that you have that test coming up every five years encourages you to stay abreast of the latest and greatest advances in the industry," Lockwood notes.

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Like Lockwood, Mike Rackers, residential HVACR manager and safety coordinator, CroppMetcalf Air Conditioning-Heating-Plumbing, Beltsville, MD, is a strong proponent of recertification.

According to Rackers, certification benefits both technicians and the companies they work for, and both should be willing participants in the recertification process.

Rackers, who holds all of the residential NATE certifications in both installation and service (air-conditioning, air distribution, air-to-air heat pump, gas furnace, oil furnace, hydronics gas and hydronics oil, as well as HVACR efficiency analyst), says NATE certification opens doors for technicians and helps them advance along their career paths. Contracting firms that recognize and strongly support NATE can help their technicians remain on a clear and promising career path by monitoring which technicians have certifications and ensuring that they're keeping them up to date.

"From the company perspective, NATE certification provides a tool to differentiate between different levels of technicians, and also a goal that technicians can work toward to ensure they're always advancing in their careers," Rackers says. "When our technicians achieve certification, the company benefits because we have more competent technicians. They have credentials of which they can be proud, and they can speak more confidently to our customers."

NATE certification also provides a company with technicians who feel good about the company they work for, Rackers adds. "Technicians appreciate

a company that encourages them to get certified, helps them prepare for the test, and works through the steps they need to take to move through the certification process. Naturally, it follows that we want them to become recertified. The company has a vested interest in recertification, because we've made a considerable investment in the technicians becoming certified."

Ensuring that technicians remain certified opens up marketing opportunities for a company among its customers and potential customers. Having a certain percentage of NATE-certified technicians also allows companies to participate in special programs offered by distributors and equipment manufacturers.

Granted, there are challenges to ensuring that technicians remain certified, Rackers says.

Not all companies have their in-house training recognized, as CroppMetcalf's is, as qualifying for continuing education under NATE. This may lead to concerns about the cost of attending enough qualifying continuing education courses, especially for technicians who have multiple certifications. But Rackers says there are ways to overcome this challenge. For example, NATE allows technicians to renew multiple certifications at once using continuing education hours. By doing multiple recertifications at the same time, NATE offers price breaks based on the number of certifications being renewed. In addition, companies that provide a tool purchase allowance can allow their technicians to use those funds toward continuing education and NATE certification or recertification.

"Don't overlook simple stumbling blocks that can prevent recertification," Rackers adds. Sometimes it's simply a matter of making sure NATE and other certifying or licensing bodies receive



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an address update when technicians move their residences or join a new company. "With the excitement and stress of moving or changing jobs, notifying NATE might not be the first thing many people think of," he says.

Finally, look for ways to keep NATE in the spotlight by recognizing the NATE-certified technicians at your company.

At CroppMetcalf, for example, a "certification wall" features pictures of all the company's technicians, along with their certifications. "In addition, at all of our company-wide functions we recognize the technicians who are NATE-certified," Rackers says. "That serves to remind them how important NATE certification — and recertification — is to both them and us." ●

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