

Certification is Changing!

As of June 1, 2008, a revised Certified Landscape Technician –Exterior (CLT-E) exam will be given by Idaho Nursery & Landscape Association and all PLANET licensees to all new and existing candidates.

Reasons for Change

For the past two years, PLANET's International Certification Council (ICC) Test Revision Committee has been working to resolve the low pass rates and to make sure the test is really testing the right things (occupational validity) and to make sure the test is legally defensible (which is important for any certification program).

This work has been an industry-driven effort. It began with a group of industry experts who identified what a landscape technician really does. They also listed the all the minimum standards and level of knowledge an individual needs to perform his or her job. The final result of this work is a document called an Occupational Analysis (OA). It gives a description of all the minimum standards required and knowledge and individual must have in order to meet certification requirements. Finally, it verifies that these standards have been established through a scientific process. The OA is the foundation required for a valid certification testing program.

The next step in the test revision process was to make sure that the material tested corresponded to the real-world tasks a technician performs in the workplace and that testing is an accurate measurement of the minimum standards established in the OA. For a certification test to be an accurate test of knowledge and ability, it must be "built" so that the technicians who should pass it, do pass the tests and so that the people who are not qualified, do not pass it. When a test is designed so that qualified people pass it and unqualified people do not pass it, then it is determined to be a "legally defensible" test.

So, the end result is a certification exam where accuracy, appropriateness, and occupationally targeted testing are the goals. In addition, the exam will be aligned to the occupation – a critical component in any certification program. The test pass rate may rise, but that will be a result of the test being a more accurate assessment of what qualified technicians need to do and need to know in their jobs. Better scores result from testing the correct skill set for the industry, not because the exam was made easier.

Major Changes to the Certification Program

Both the installation and maintenance modules have been split, resulting in these five certifications:

1. Softscape Installation
2. Hardscape Installation
3. Turf Maintenance
4. Ornamental Maintenance
5. Irrigation

Changes to the Certification Test

Almost all of the hands-on problems that have made up the CLT test will remain in the test, but with some changes that will improve the judging process. Numerous other changes will be implemented that will protect the integrity of the certification, and streamline the administration of the exam.

1. Written exams

- Common Core – The industry task force confirmed that the common elements to all industry technical certifications are based on safety, communication, motor vehicles,

math, and reporting. The new common core will be written and will focus on only these areas.

- Comprehension – Each one of the five certifications will have a series of written exams specific to the five certifications. Some problems, such as Irrigation ID and Pruning, have been changed from hands-on problems to a part of this written exam. For all other problems where the judge asked questions requiring a verbal response, the verbal portion has been moved to the written exam.
- Calculations – Several hands-on problems involved a component where the candidate was required to do mathematical calculations. These questions will be moved to the written comprehension sections of the written exam.
- Written Exam Length – The length of each written exam will be longer than the current written exam due to the changes listed above.

2. Hands-on tests

- Fewer hands-on problems – As a result of dividing the maintenance and installation modules, the hands-on portion can now be completed in less than four hours. The new certifications will test a narrower scope of material that is more relevant to the occupation of the landscape technician.
- Components of hands-on problems – Technical and safety components have been re-weighted in all hands-on problems. Prior to the test, candidates will be provided with a clear breakdown of the technical component and the safety component of each problem. (E.g. Chainsaw will have a much higher safety component than Sod Installation.)

3. Test problem deletions

In the steps taken to align the test material to the occupation, the following problems have been deleted:

- Truck and Trailer (1.11) – Even though this problem tested a skill valued by all employers, it is not a skill required of a qualified landscape technician. There was some overlap in what was being tested by this problem and motor vehicle agencies, as well as some liability issues for PLANET and state licensees.
- Plant Sensitivity (1.04) – The OA determined that the skills tested in this problem went beyond the scope of work of a landscape technician. These are valuable skills to have, but they are more relevant to the scope of work of the landscape designer.
- Pesticide (3.08) – Pesticide application is controlled more and more by state and provincial legislation. Changes in the pesticide industry are making this more of a specialized trade. The hands-on portion has been eliminated, though the written portion will still have some questions on pesticides.

Changes for Current CLT-Es

Individuals who currently hold the CLT-E certification in Installation and/or Maintenance will be receiving notification from PLANET of their new designations after June 1. All individuals currently holding the CLT-E Installation will automatically receive both Softscape Installation and Hardscape Installation certifications. Likewise, the individuals with the CLT-E Maintenance will receive both Turf Maintenance and Ornamental Maintenance certifications. The designation will not change for current CLT-Es holding the Irrigation certification.

Candidates Currently in the Testing Process

Candidates who are in the process of testing for the CLT-E certification and only need to pass one or more of these deleted problems (truck and trailer, plant sensitivity or pesticides) to attain their certification

will be notified and awarded their certifications after January 1, 2008 without further testing. These candidates will be notified by both the Idaho Nursery & Landscape Association and the PLANET Certification Department.

Candidates who required one or more of the deleted problems in addition to other problems will be notified by the Idaho Nursery & Landscape Association of which of the problems they still need to complete in order to earn their certification.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- **All I needed was Truck and Trailer. Am I now certified?** Effective January 1, 2008, you will be!
- **I now have my Hardscape Installation, but still need two more problems to complete Softscape Installation. How do I get the second one?** Some candidates will find that they have been awarded one of the new certifications, but are one or two problems short of receiving the second certification. The decision to finish the second certification will be left to the candidate; however candidates will be encouraged to complete the remainder.
- **I still need one problem in each Turf Maintenance and Ornamental Maintenance. Can I still get both on the same day?** Candidates finding that they still need several problems to pass either one of the new certifications may choose to pursue one over the other, or they may choose to continue both. If hands-on problems have been successfully completed, candidates will not have to redo these. However, there may be some overlap in the content of the written exam section with content already tested previously in a hands-on test.
- **All I needed was Pruning. Do I have to write the entire written exam?** No, you will only need to take one of the sections of the written exam that contains the pruning questions; however, it will also contain plant care questions in addition to the pruning questions.
- **All I needed was Instrument. Do I have to redo the hands-on test and take the entire written exam?** You will have to redo the hands-on test; however this portion is now a much simpler procedure with the calculation portion removed. You do not have to take the entire hardscape installation written exam, but you will have to take the section of the written exam that contains the grading, drainage and instrument questions.
- **All I needed was Sod Installation. Do I have to redo the hands-on test and take the entire written exam?** You will have to redo the hands-on test, and you will have to take one section of the written comprehension that deals with sodding and the care of sod and plant material.
- **All I needed was Work Orders. How do I finish this?** Work Orders is no longer tested in conjunction with Sod Installation. You will now need to take the Common Core written exam that deals with work orders and reporting.
- **I took the test last year before I was ready, and I missed numerous problems. I am now ready for the test, but need help to decide what to take. What do I do?** Call Ann Bates at the Idaho Nursery & Landscape Association office 800-462-4769 for clarification.

New Testing Implementation

The new CLT-E exams will be administered by all CLT-E licensees as of June 1, 2008.