

Periodic Proficiency Training Betye Bailey; Adam Bell

The Department of Transportation mandates Breath Alcohol Technician (BAT) training every five years, but effective training is an ongoing process, not just an inconvenient event that must be endured every 5th year. Periodic Proficiency Training refers to instruction delivered above and beyond DOT's mandates, enabling service providers to exceed requirements and hone their skills on an annual or bi-annual basis. The type of ongoing training described here greatly enhances the competency of BATs, creating a powerful defense in the case of a disputed test.

With a five-year lapse in training, some knowledge may be forgotten. It is not uncommon for a BAT to conduct testing for a year or more before being confronted with a positive test result. When they encounter an unfamiliar situation, BATs can panic and commit compounding errors that make a bad situation worse. Providing an opportunity for ongoing practice is essential to maintaining BAT competency.

There are many benefits to Periodic Proficiency Training, including:

- **Reinforcing consistency**
One of the key elements of a successful program is consistency of operation. Engaging in Periodic Proficiency Training helps ensure that your staff is doing things the same way (and the correct way) every time.
- **Providing a second opportunity for BATs to acquire information missed in initial training**
When training adults, it is important to remember that there will be moments when the subject matter is not being given their full attention. Sometimes students are pulled from the classroom for phone calls or other matters and important information can be missed. Periodic Proficiency Training can provide students with an opportunity to acquire information that might have been missed the first time around.
- **Offering a chance to make sure staff is current on the DOT procedures and with any rule changes**
Rules and procedures for breath alcohol testing and specimen collection have undergone changes over the years. An ongoing Periodic Proficiency Training program can make sure that your staff's knowledge of DOT rules and regulations is up-to-date and that they are following the proper procedures.
- **Addressing errors that may have happened in your facility**
Periodic Proficiency Training can help prevent errors, especially improper procedures that have become ingrained into your corporate culture. Sometimes the wrong way of doing things gets passed down from employee to employee, especially to new hires. Once established, these erroneous procedures can be hard to eliminate. Periodic Proficiency Training can address and correct these errors before they become an issue during an audit or legal proceeding.
- **Protecting your business from liability**
Providing training to your staff that exceeds the DOT requirements is an investment in the future. Mistakes can cost you customers. Providing test results that are not defensible will cause clients to seek more competent service providers. Periodic Proficiency Training can give your BATs the skills they need to do the job right the first time and every time. Without a doubt, repeated errors can cause you to lose business.

Forms of Proficiency Training

Periodic Proficiency Training can be delivered using a variety of methods including, but not limited to, lecture-oriented class, role play, newsletter, or non-mandated error correction training. No matter which method you use, it is important to have some way to verify students' mastery of information. This can take the form of written exams or hands-on exercises. It is important to maintain documentation of proficiency exercises and training.

May 9, 2013

A lecture-oriented presentation is the standard method of instruction. A Periodic Proficiency Training class should not just be a rehash of your existing Instrument Proficiency lecture, rather, it should contain new content with new materials and focus on unusual occurrences coupled with your specific needs.

One of the best ways to prepare your staff for managing difficult situations is to have them experience the situation in a safe and controlled setting. Role play can provide an opportunity for students to practice handling a difficult subject or collection. Reviewing the proper language to use during stressful situations is another topic that can be effectively addressed through role play. Rehearsing these situations can prepare your staff to respond properly. It is essential that role play training is properly monitored to ensure that your policies are being followed consistently.

Utilizing electronic solutions such as video conferencing or an e-newsletter can be a good choice for delivering Periodic Proficiency Training to a staff that is spread out over multiple locations. This is a method of training that can easily be delivered as frequently as needed. The flexible nature of this technique allows content to easily be adapted to cover any recent rule changes or problem areas.

Tip: Send a newsletter with questions about your instrument's display messages. BAT responses will identify problem spots right away.

Material to cover

Periodic Proficiency Training should focus on obstacles to completing a valid test (including positive test results), since these are the scenarios that don't happen very often.

- **Equipment issues**

Every BAT should be familiar with the displays and void codes of the equipment on which they were certified. This is why, in many cases, the best training comes from the manufacturer of the EBT device.

Some examples include:

- Printer not working/changing paper in the printer
- Accuracy Check failed
- Battery power failed (device will not turn on)
- Air Blank is greater than zero
- Instrument will not take a sample of breath

- **Procedural issues**

With mandated training occurring only every five years, it is not uncommon for details to be forgotten or overlooked. There are many situations that a BAT may only have to address once or twice in a five-year period. If there are competencies that are not being utilized often, addressing them in Periodic Proficiency Training can strengthen your staff's ability to handle uncommon issues. Training should include role play examples of communicating to the donor and maintaining composure. Sample topics include:

- How to deal with a positive test result (**Tip: Make sure you wait the entire 15 minutes during the mock tests, letting the instrument prompt the BAT through the confirmation test. If you don't, BATs will not know what the proper displays should look like.**)
- How to deal with insufficient breath/manual samples
- How to conduct a confirmation test only (screening was done in a different location or on a different device)
- What to do (or not do) during the 15 minute wait period

- **Subject/Donor issues**

Test subjects can also create unique challenges for a BAT collector, either inadvertently or by being uncooperative. This is another area where role play will be of value. Invent testing scenarios involving one of the obstacles mentioned below and act out the scenarios with your BATs. One of the easiest things to introduce to your procedures is the use of scripted statements when explaining the test to the donor/employee. Go over these scripted statements in your training. Example issues include:

- Donor doesn't want to sign Step 2
- Uncooperative subject

May 9, 2013

- Donor cannot provide an adequate breath sample
- Positive test results (yes, it's worth a second mention)

Probably the most important Trainer Tip we can provide is to make sure BATs understand every display on their EBT instrument, not just the ones that come up during negative, uneventful tests. The instrument displays are programmed to prompt the BAT through the process and the BAT must take the time to read and understand these prompts to complete a successful test.

Periodic Proficiency Training is extremely advantageous to your organization. With ongoing training, you can be confident that your Breath Alcohol Technicians will be competent to perform their duties correctly, every time.

Bio:

Betye Bailey is the Training Manager for Intoximeters, Inc. and has been conducting DOT-compliant workplace training for 15 years. Adam Bell has been a Corporate Trainer at Intoximeters for 8 years.