

Sprinkler Fitters U.A. Local 709

Client-at-a-Glance

Sprinkler Fitters U.A. Local 709 is an organization of 1000+ Union journeypersons, apprentices, and retirees, who work in the specialized field of fire suppression. They pride themselves in providing the best-trained and best-qualified sprinkler fitters in all aspects of fire protection.

Members install, repair, maintain, inspect, and service all types of fire suppression systems in commercial, residential, and industrial sites. Local 709 educates members through a well-rounded five year apprenticeship program and classes to keep journeypersons up to date with new technological advances in fire suppression.

Apprentice Candidates Found with Skills Test

Sprinkler Fitters Union Local 709 in Los Angeles depends on its apprentice training program to develop new members and an ongoing supply of expert craftsmen for the industry. The intensive five year program combines 40 hours a week of on-the-job training with a series of increasingly complex courses that slowly shape unskilled workers into seasoned journeypersons. Industry businesses have come to rely on the apprentice program to deliver a stock of skilled workers, making hiring decisions based on the quality of the candidates the program turns out.

The highly sought after program has 60 openings available every two years and receives up to 400 applicants, says Robin Schledorn, Director of Training. It is important to be selective because the training requires years of commitment and considerable cognitive ability.

When the state of California discontinued its assessment program for unions, Local 709 had no way to qualitatively evaluate candidates.

“It was a big scary problem,” Schledorn says. “In construction, math is a big part of everything we do. You have to be able to convert fractions to decimals, read plans, cut materials. It’s important that candidates have the skills to do that.”

Schledorn began using the Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (WBST) to measure candidates’ basic math and verbal skills based on established requirements for any position. As a union, she is required to get state approval for any tests used as an evaluation tool. **“The State of California approved the test, and inserted it into our standards, authorizing us to use the test as part of our application process,” she says.**

Test scores tell Schledorn instantly whether applicants have the skills to succeed. Wonderlic Basic Skills Test scores count as 50% of the overall rating that determines who is accepted. The other 50% is based on rankings given during an oral interview. Using structured interview questions, candidates are rated on dependability, reliability, and commitment. The scores are then added together and candidates are selected based on who has the highest number.



Now every apprentice candidate takes the Wonderlic Basic Skills Test, and Schledorn has found it to be easier and more useful than the old state test.

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