

A Change of PACE

By Jolene Miller

In mid-July, I received a phone call from PACE Coordinator Diane Gallo. She presented an opportunity for me to once again contribute to the profession and to NFPA.

Diane was putting together a team to update the PACE exam and she asked if I would be willing to participate. After mulling over Diane's request, I decided the opportunity was too good to pass up. After all, I needed a change of pace, and how hard could it be to replace a few test questions?

As I drove to NFPA Headquarters on that hot August morning, I couldn't help but recall the mid-year meeting in Kansas City where the idea developed to create an advanced competency test. I had vivid recollections of the delegates in attendance, the meeting room setting and ensuing debate.

It seemed like only yesterday that after much discussion, heated debate, thoughtful reflection and hours of compromise, PACE was born. How could it be that after only two years, the exam needed updating?

I had no idea in advance how the weekend would unfold. However, if history repeated itself, I was confident that by the time I left Headquarters, I would be mentally over-stimulated, physically exhausted and appropriately overfed. And, as with all NFPA projects, I was not disappointed on any account.

Paul King from PES very succinctly defined our assignment. Over the course of the next two days, it would be our responsibility to review each and every test question to determine if it needed to be replaced on the exam.

Much to my amazement, Paul was able to provide us with a myriad of statistics on how each test question performed over the past two years. For example, we knew how many folks answered each question correctly, which distracters had been effective and which were not. In fact, we even knew the percent of test-takers who chose a wrong answer but still passed the test.

We began our task by carefully reading each question and reviewing the answers/distracters. As we methodically moved through the 200 questions, the team determined whether or not each question should be replaced or the answer possibilities modified.

Unbeknownst to any of us, Professional Examination Services predetermined what percentage of the test questions needed to be replaced to refresh PACE. We had unwittingly met the target.

I mistakenly assumed the task of replacing test questions would be a very simple process. After all, Diane came armed with enough paper to cause any spotted owl to worry! This step, in fact, proved more difficult than the first. Each question selected from the "bank" had to match the rubric/domain of the question it replaced.

When at last our assignment was complete, there was a great sense of relief among team members. We knew we'd made a positive contribution to PACE. And, as I drove home to Topeka that Sunday afternoon, thoroughly exhausted, I knew I had truly experienced a change of PACE.

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