

Maintaining the National Certification Program for Home and Property Inspectors

The Problem:

For a decade, leaders from across the private home inspection industry have worked with government and other stakeholders to raise the professionalism of the industry and, in so doing, to better protect consumer's interests. In part, this was to be accomplished by establishing a voluntary, industry-led, non-aligned, consistent and national certification of industry practitioners. To that end, national certification and accreditation models were developed and implemented that would lead to a recognizable and credible private home inspection industry and increased worker mobility between jurisdictions. The final result was the National Certification Program (NCP).

The framework for national certification of Canadian home and property inspectors under a National Certification Program was developed and tested. With its eight major components – (1) governance, (2) financial, (3) administrative, (4) certification, (5) accreditation, (6) TIPR (Test Inspection with Peer Review) exam, (7) communication and (8) equivalency - it was released for implementation by a National Certification Authority (NCA) in July 2006.

The Canadian Association of Home and Property Inspectors National (CAHPI National) was entrusted to implement and administer the National Certification Program (NCP) on behalf of all private home inspectors. This implementation was established by an elected body comprised of National Certificate Holders (NCH). The governance and structural elements of the NCP were based on “Criteria for Accreditation of Personnel Certification Bodies”, CSA Standard CAN-P-9. A National Certification Authority (NCA) with various Councils and Committees was established to operate at arm’s-length to manage and control the certification and accreditation processes for home inspectors seeking National Certificate Holder (NCH) status and to recognize successful candidates.

By adhering to the requirements of CAN-P-9, the NCP process was to have been fair and independent of vested interests. The result to date has been a very successful program which continued to grow; there are over 400 registered National Certificate Holders in Canada and 60 Candidates from across Canada waiting to take their TIPR. However, as CAHPI National existed at the pleasure of its provincial or regional chapters, the provincial associations decided in April 2010 to abolish the NCP and transfer the NCA’s administration to CAHPI Provincial Chapters.

This action presents serious and immediate problems for the industry and for housing stakeholders:

- An independent national body dedicated to the professionalization of the private home inspection profession no longer exists. With no delineation between an association and an independent certifying authority, it should be expected that each provincial body will strive to regain control of their disparate certification and accreditation processes.
- The possibility of National Certification will not be universal, if available at all; only members of CAHPI Chapters can be considered. The CAHPI directive states “The provincial or regional chapters of CAHPI will maintain all national certificates until the certificates expire in 2011^(Ref 1).” National Certificate Holders will be absorbed into the CAHPI Provincial associations. Provincial associations regain the power to determine whether or not an individual should be within the National Certification Program and to determine the businesses of inspection training providers.
- As CAHPI Chapters have been unable to implement CAN-P-9 standards as the basis for the national certification model^(Ref 2), any present, past or future provincially offered “national” certification will lack a clear audit path for each and every certification and accreditation. Thus, “national” no longer conforms to the requirements of the National Certification Program according to the National Occupational Standard and the ideals of the NCP model^(Ref 2).

- As noted in the CAHPI directive NCH, certificates will expire in 2011 and inspectors` status as national certificate holders or candidates will terminate. The NCH certificate is referenced as an acceptable credential for mandatory licensing of home inspectors in British Columbia, and has gained favourable interest in other jurisdictions. CAHPI`s action serves to underscore the perception of an out of control, unprofessional industry and undermines its case for industry self-governance
- Important stakeholders for this industry support national uniform standards of competency for home inspectors. They do not recommend or endorse any individual home inspector or association ^(Ref 3). Abolition of the NCP breaks the understandings reached with and removes the support of these stakeholders and would also seem to breach CAHPI National's financial contribution agreement with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) ^(Ref 4).

The Proposed Solution:

The proposed solution ^(Ref 5) to problems precipitated from the CAHPI action is to immediately re-establish the National Certification Authority and give it permanent autonomy as an incorporated national entity, independent of all home inspector association or other vested interests. In essence, this means to re-implement the National Certification Program as originally designed ^(Ref 6), have it administered by an independent NCA, and have all roles and responsibilities related to the National Certification Program explicitly aligned to CAN-P-9 criteria. The status of all National Certificate Holders, Candidates, and accredited course providers would revert to that existing prior to abolition by CAHPI, thus minimizing their hardship.

A brief transition period will be required to implement these changes. It is further proposed that the NCA be placed in the care of a new certification body that agrees to be found in reasonable compliance with CAN-P-9 and with objective of becoming recognized as a self-sustaining third party certification entity. This would be a defined short term agreement to allow the National Certification Authority time to incorporate and keep the existing process operational during the transition.

Alternatively the NHICC requests that this proposal be considered by CAHPI National and is awaiting their response.

The failure of the CAHPI Chapter structure to support National Certification demonstrates the need for a national body, with no provincial bodies, with direct inspector membership from across Canada, with Directors elected from its NCH base, and with consumer protection explicit in its mission statement.

To this end, the NHICC is prepared to re-implement the National Certification Program and the NCA structure with minor modifications to reflect self-sufficiency. Additionally it will assure that the elected NCH representatives comprising the NCA be devoted to dealing strictly with a fair, open and transparent certification and accreditation process. Following in the footsteps the NHICC would review and consider equivalency agreements, thus offering its members a clear path to National Certification. The NHICC would also establish, and have verified, that its By-Laws, Policies and Procedures are in reasonable compliance with CAN-P-9.

The mandate to implement this solution comes from consensus amongst industry leaders for a unified national body that represents the private inspection industry ^(Ref 8). This is further supported by an industry prepared report ^(Ref 9) outlining a strategy to develop certification for the entire home inspection profession at a national level and to develop and implement national standards leading to industry regulation, standards of performance for training, and base qualifications for individuals entering the profession. Recognizing this and that the majority of practitioners do not to belong to any professional inspection association or a qualified private firm ^(Ref 10), the only tenable mandate for National Certification is through independent national implementation, not by provincial associations.

References:

- 1.) Website Announcement - <http://www.nca-anc.com/>
- 2.) CHIBO II Project, National Certification and Accreditation Model for Home and Property Inspectors. October 2005. Construction Sector Council and CAHPI
- 3.) Hiring a Home Inspector, About Your House CE 35. 2010. CMHC. p.4
- 4.) CMHC -CAHPI National Contribution Agreement. 2006
- 5.) A Proposal for Immediate and Permanent Autonomy for the National Certification Authority. April 2010. PHPIO
- 6.) CHIBO II Report
- 8.) CMHC industry survey and industry meeting industry. 1996
- 9.) A Strategy to Provide Coordination of the Canadian Home Inspection Profession. June 1997.
- 10.) A Blueprint for National Certification. February 2010