



Ian McComish

Training Director



19560 - 96 th AVENUE,
SURREY, BC V4N 4C3
Tel: **604-882-8212**
Fax: **604-882-8207**

Memorandum

Re: Residential HVAC Workforce Certification

Issued by: UA 516 and the Refrigeration Training Institute

Context

The BC Government launched a consultation process to consider the development of a Residential HVAC Workforce Certification program. The research for this process was undertaken by the Home Performance Stakeholder Council, a non-profit society that supports the growth of home performance industry, including supporting quality residential HVAC systems installations. The report recommends the following actions:

1. Requesting SkilledTradesBC to review and adopt appropriate trade certifications for residential heat pump installations.
2. Continuing to refine the Home Performance Contractor Network requirements for heat pump installation.
3. Establishing a separate HVAC Design certifications
4. AHJ's establishing permitting and licensing requirements that will reference appropriate certifications.
5. Establishing an HVAC Solutions Council.

The United Association 516 and the Refrigeration Training Institute have expressed great concern with the above noted recommendations, and specifically, with the implementation of a new trade certificate. The following briefing outlines the key concerns and provides possible solutions to alleviate these issues.

About the UA 516 and the Refrigeration Training Institute

UA Local 516 is the HVAC/R local union in British Columbia and currently has over 1,400 members that work primarily behind the scenes, servicing the day-to-day needs of Canadians, including residential systems. UA Local 516 is dedicated to protecting and advancing the economic and social goals of its members and ensuring that the HVAC/R trade continues to be one of the most highly regarded trades. Education is a core value of the union, and UA Local 516 apprentices are expected to become the best journeypersons in the industry.

The Refrigeration Training Institute (RTI) was developed from the Journeyman and Apprentice Training Fund, governed by both labour and employer representatives with the purpose of providing the best and most up-to-date training to members working for contributing contractors. We work hard to make sure the investment made by our members pays dividends for them and our contractors. RTI is a not-for-profit trade school and is an approved trainer for Refrigeration & Gas Fitter Apprentices by SkilledTradesBC and Technical Safety BC.

The UA 516 and RTI have a long-standing history which makes us uniquely qualified to comment and advise on the advancement of any technical training, and possible certifications, that are relevant to the trade. Currently UA 516 has 460 apprentices. We are the largest sponsor of Refrigeration Apprentices in BC and the 4th largest sponsor of trades apprentices in the province. Since 1942 UA Local 516 has worked side by side with our contractors to ensure our members' families have had healthy employers able to provide well-paying jobs. Our training programs keep our members up to date on the latest technology entering our industry.



Ian McComish
Training Director



Challenges

1. Consultation process lacked input from key stakeholders including technical trades expertise and the contractor community.

During the initial research project, approximately 75% of the stakeholders interviewed did not directly work in residential heating and cooling. Without meaningful involvement of those directly impacted by the proposal, the research does not adequately consider any foreseeable impacts on the future of the industry. In fact, only four out of 20 people in the consultation committee identified as having a trades certification that would allow them to work on a residential HVAC system. Incorporating new requirements on a trade based on suggestions from a committee that is so limited in trades awareness will inevitably have problems with implementation and could result in unintended consequences throughout the industry.

2. Recruitment and training of skilled labour workers is a challenge for many in the industry. It remains unclear how an additional certification would solve this fundamental problem.

It is clear across the construction industry that labour supply is a fundamental challenge to building infrastructure projects. We understand that there needs to be more resources put towards trades training, recruitment and retention of skilled trade workers. Our union and training school are aligned with government on the need to provide more opportunities to people to get a skilled trade and be provided with a good, family providing job.

The development of an additional certification does nothing to solve the challenge of labour market supply. As an industry, we are already competing for a limited workforce and pool of candidates who are interested in becoming a trades worker. We would suggest that to truly solve this challenge, and to get more people in the industry, a new funding formula for trades training should be introduced. Currently the RTI is trying to increase our capacity from 24 to 28 classes per year, but there is no guarantee of additional funding for those classes. SkilledTradesBC needs to be properly resourced to provide adequate training for those who desire to obtain a skilled trade.

3. Creating niche tickets devalues skilled trades, creating jobs that are underpaid and undervalued.

It is a core belief of the UA 516 and the RTI that creating “micro-credentials” or niche tickets devalues the skilled trades. Being an HVAC/R mechanic requires a high level of technical expertise involving mechanical and electrical expertise, working at heights and working long hours and on call. The full scope of the trade is what has created jobs that are family-supporting, good jobs. Removing key elements of the trade into smaller credentials not only devalues the trade that we have so much pride in, but removes the opportunity for others to gain access to this type of long-lasting career. It limits the opportunities for people to increase their knowledge and earning potential and instead allows contractors to earn additional profits off working people. In summary, a micro credential of this nature erodes the status and long-history of the Red Seal trade.



Ian McComish

Training Director



Possible Alternatives

The UA 516 and the RTI understand the need to retrofit homes and buildings to green, clean technology. With rising temperatures, the advancement of cooling systems is more critical than ever. We stand willing to partner with government to solve this challenge and provide the workforce needed to deliver heat pumps into homes. Possible alternatives to the currently outlined pathways are discussed below.

1. Provide additional funding to HVAC/R Training Providers to incorporate heat pump installation in current curriculum and to add additional spaces to trades classrooms.

The fundamental challenge with any new technology is finding the people who are trained and capable of implementing new technology. The RTI feels that with the appropriate resourcing for both classroom space and recruitment, we can meet the demands of industry and provide a qualified workforce to do the jobs at hand. We suggest government undertake a labour market assessment and provide a more wholesome understanding of the labour required, the jobs that are available and the timeline for implementation across the province. With that information, a workforce development strategy could be conceived and appropriate resourcing could be put forward into the delivery of that strategy.

2. Develop a heat pump installation upgrading course to be offered to HVAC/R mechanics.

Designing and enforcing residential HVAC codes and standards is a separate issue from introducing a new trade to the Skilled Trades Act. This type of discussion requires further information and consideration of the legal framework that might be required to pursue this effort. With that said, it is worth considering how current HVAC/R mechanics could possibly be additionally trained on this new technology. The development of a curriculum for upgrading courses for currently certified HVAC/R mechanics would support the implementation of a trained workforce that is ready to install the appropriate systems.

Conclusion

The UA 516 and the RTI understand the challenges of climate change – our members are installing air conditioning units and supporting the retrofitting of buildings in a higher capacity than ever before. While we recognize this is a fundamental challenge of our time, we strongly encourage the government to consider alternative pathways to supporting the installation of heat pumps. We do not believe that the development of a new trade will solve the current labour shortage and support the transition to a green economy in a quick manner.

19560 - 96 th AVENUE,
SURREY, BC V4N 4C3
Tel: **604-882-8212**
Fax: **604-882-8207**