

CHAPTER 4

PREPARATION, ORIENTATION & PRACTICE SESSIONS

The CPAT is a widely used, comprehensive physical ability test designed specifically for the fire service. Use of the CPAT now requires specific requirements for candidate preparation, orientation and practice sessions. Pursuant to the conciliation agreement with the EEOC, the CPAT program **must provide all candidates an opportunity to attend at least two CPAT orientations**. Additionally, all candidates must receive “hands-on” familiarity with the test apparatus and receive guidance on specific conditioning regimens and techniques to help them prepare for the test. **Each candidate shall also be provided an opportunity to perform practice runs of the CPAT.**

PREPARATION

The employer must provide all candidates with pretest materials to ensure that all candidates have an equal opportunity to compete for the job of fire fighter. Such a preparation guide provides all candidates, regardless of their background or experience in exercise principals and techniques, the same opportunity to succeed. Similarly, this helps the department avoid failing candidates who are physically capable but unprepared for testing.

The preparation guide must include information on:

- The physical demands of the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT)
- The necessity of proper hydration
- Basic training principles
- Warm up techniques
- Flexibility techniques
- Muscular strength/endurance techniques
- Cardiovascular endurance techniques
- Training techniques for those without a gym or specialized equipment

A sample CPAT Preparation Guide is included in Appendix B.

It is mandatory that all candidates receive a preparation guide at least eight weeks prior to their CPAT date. The guide can be distributed at the time of application or at the orientation prior to the CPAT. In addition, departments may distribute the preparation guide during recruitment activities and such materials should be a part of all mentoring activities.

ORIENTATION

As initially designed and developed, the CPAT provided for **voluntary** orientation sessions intended to familiarize candidates with the test apparatus and requirements. However, increased orientation and practice opportunities significantly improve the ability of all candidates to complete the CPAT within the “cut off” time of 10 minutes and 20 seconds. Therefore, **it is now mandatory that all candidates must be given the opportunity to attend at least two (2) orientation sessions, with the first session taking place at least eight (8) weeks prior to the actual test date.**

During the sessions, candidates will receive “hands on” familiarity with the actual CPAT apparatus. Also during the orientation sessions, Certified Peer Fitness Trainers, fitness professionals, and/or CPAT-trained fire fighters (proctors) shall familiarize all candidates with each task and apparatus, and shall advise all candidates concerning specific conditioning regimens and techniques to help them prepare for the CPAT. **The comprehensive procedures for conducting CPAT orientation sessions are found in Appendix B.**

PRACTICE SESSIONS

Fire departments utilizing the CPAT shall also ensure that all candidates have full and equal opportunity to perform **at least two (2) timed practice runs, using actual CPAT apparatus and completing the entire course. These mandatory practice sessions shall occur within thirty (30) days of the official test date.** Again, Certified Peer Fitness Trainers, fitness professionals and/or CPAT-trained fire fighters (proctors) shall help the candidates understand the test elements and how they can improve their performance and conditioning.

In order to reduce the burden on a department’s resources, **it is permissible for a candidate to pass the CPAT during either of the practice sessions, provided that the department has fully staffed and administered the test as they would on the official test day.** However, a candidate who passes the CPAT during a practice session **shall not** be rank ordered ahead of any candidate who requires both practice sessions and the official test to pass the CPAT.

WAIVER

Although the two-phased orientation and practice program set forth above must be treated by the fire department as a mandatory condition for candidates taking the CPAT test, it is recognized that fire departments are likely to have candidates in their candidate pool who believe that they are capable of passing the CPAT without attending the orientation and practice program. It is also recognized that resources devoted to the orientation and practice program are best spent on those candidates who will truly benefit from this assistance. It is therefore permissible for fire departments to excuse candidates from this requirement upon receipt of a written and signed waiver from the candidate acknowledging that this orientation and practice program was made available to all candidates on an equal basis and that the candidate voluntarily and knowingly waives the opportunity to participate in the orientation and practice program.

It is required that all those that are licensed to use the CPAT must fully implement these orientation and pre-test procedures. The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has also agreed to not bring a lawsuit through April 2011, based upon any claim that the CPAT has an adverse impact for female candidates, against any fire department that utilizes CPAT in conformity with those conditions in their pre-test programs. For those fire departments that are utilizing another Licensee to conduct their CPAT, such fire department, as the employer, must ensure that these changes are incorporated. The EEOC Conciliation Agreement setting forth the foregoing is found in Appendix F. ■