

**TESTIMONY ON LR 344
STUDY ON EST LOW VOLTAGE LICENSING**

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October 20, 2006**

My name is Randal A. Lemke, Ph.D. and I am the Executive Director of InfoComm International. Thank you for letting me present the views of our association, which is composed of 4,000 members, including 13 companies and state institutions with employees who live and work in Nebraska, some of whom will join me in testifying today in vehemently opposing further studying implementation of an EST licensing program. While I join you from the nation's greater capitol area, I was born and raised in Nebraska, and am a graduate of the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

InfoComm International is the trade association of the professional audiovisual and information communications industries. Established in 1939, our members include manufacturers, systems integrators, dealers and distributors, independent consultants, programmers, rental and staging companies, end-users and multimedia professionals from more than 60 countries. InfoComm's training and education programs, along with its Certified Technology Specialist (CTS) and Certified Audiovisual Solutions Provider (CAVSP) credentials, set a standard of excellence for AV professionals.

InfoComm strongly supports objective testing of skills and knowledge as the basis for any state licensure program for the low voltage workers, because that is in the best interest of the consumer and ultimately the industry. Similarly, InfoComm's certification program has always stressed that it is based upon measuring candidates' knowledge and ability. Additionally, candidates can take the exam without paying for InfoComm courses and they do not have to be members of the association. We will continue to promote a fair and open environment to prepare today's technology workers for tomorrow's technology. The Department of Labor included InfoComm as the important information resource for those looking to explore entering into a career as an audiovisual technician in its Occupational Outlook Handbook. InfoComm has the support of the industry for its certification program. With more than 5,600 holders of the Certified Technology Specialist designation, it is the industry standard, compared to about 200 EST holders around the world. Currently, 27 Nebraska audiovisual industry professionals have earned their CTS, as compared with not one EST holder.

For two years the Custom Electronic Design Industry Association and the National Systems Contractors Association has attempted to get industry support for the EST program. It has been widely ignored. There are several reasons for this, but the major reason is that the program is too long, too basic and is not subject to adequate outside review. From a content standpoint, as an analogy, the EST program teaches the equivalent of the alphabet, rather than teaching students to read.

The manuals that have been developed for the EST program have not been kept up-to-date, which is critical for the education of high-tech workers. While I was earning my Ph.D. in education, it was drilled into us that one of the most important parts of developing curricula is keeping the texts that accompany it relevant, and I ensure that InfoComm updates its educational materials every six months. But this is even more critical when contemplating a licensing program, as workers should not be required to take a specific class from a single private company, but should be able to take a state test based on the books alone. Among other problems, the current EST

books do not reflect the current National Electrical Code or current IT operating systems or hardware.

For instance:

Task Module 33205, page 27 states, "...NEC Section 800-11 specifies that the point of entry for communications wiring and cables be within 20' if the electrical service point." Looking at Section 800.11 in the 2002 NEC, it states no such thing.

Task Module 33205, page 27 states, "...a separate grounding electrode must be installed in accordance with NEC Section 800-40(b)(3)..." Section 800-40(b)(3) does not exist in the 2005 or 2002 NEC.

Task Module 33205, page 30 states, "The CATV company grounds the shield of the incoming coaxial cable in accordance with the one of the many approved methods described in NEC Section 800-20, Part D." There is no NEC 800-20 since at least the 2002 NEC.

Task Module 33209, Page 27, Fig. 20 and page 47, Fig. 41 show typical crimping tools. No mention is made of the newer (and superior) linear compression tools and connectors which save many hours of technician time with increased consistency and reliability.

Task Module 33209, Page 83, Appendix A, could be updated to include the practice of lead free soldering. as it is getting to be more important with the EU banning lead based solder with their WEEE / RoHS directives.

The IT section is completely unusable and is on the level, at best, for a fourth grader. It is several years out of date as it relates to hardware and servers and is too basic to be of value to anyone contemplating entering the IT field. There is barely any reference to the Internet.

Beyond the problems with the books, the EST program also overlooks that there is no such thing as an electronic systems or "low voltage" industry. It makes little sense in trying to characterize an industry by the amount of current it uses. It only serves to differentiate industry workers from electricians who do high voltage. But so much more specialized knowledge is required to properly install a videoconferencing system, digital signage or a command and control center.

One of the claims of CEDIA and NSCA is that the EST is a federally supported apprenticeship program. Reviewing the number of apprentices in this program you find only 45 people who have signed up over a four year period. And that does not reflect the numbers who have dropped out. While it may be a federally supported program, it is not supported by the industry and incidentally not even by CEDIA and NSCA members.

Trying to create the illusion of an electronic systems industry fails as well. That would include computer makers, telephony, consumer electronics, security, AV, sprinkler systems and just about anything invented since the transistor was introduced in the 1950s. I don't think the electronic systems industry is going to replace the IT, telecommunications, security or, for that matter, the AV industry. Each of these industries is using technology for the benefits of the customer, but they each have distinct areas of expertise and skills that keep them separate. That is why people who work in these industries hire people who have certifications in these specific areas and why these specialized industries refuse to expend their training dollars for an industry certification for an industry that does not exist.

Despite the lack of overall support for the EST program, CEDIA and NSCA seek the state's assistance to create a competitive marketing advantage for EST over many other generally accepted programs by branding the license with the EST name. If a study goes forward, these out-of-state associations will tell consumers that the state of Nebraska is seriously considering mandating the EST for all low voltage workers and they should invest their training dollars in it now, at the expense of other more generally accepted programs. All of this will be at the expense of Nebraska's businesses and taxpayers.

Why has this legislation been introduced when not one company in Nebraska has chosen to invest in the EST training program and other groups are ably serving the needs of their industries? Because two out-of-state associations created an ineffective, undesirable certification program at considerable expense to their memberships. Now they stand before you, unable to convince their memberships and other industries to invest in this program, and are seeking to create a state mandate for it.

They targeted Nebraska not because there is any compelling state interest or benefit to Nebraska consumers or to the Nebraska workforce, but because they were hoping to quietly sneak it through the single Unicameral system, and then shop it to other states throughout the country with the State of Nebraska's approval. They tried a similar tactic in the small state of New Hampshire, which has a fast-acting legislature, and were soundly rejected. If you agree to even study this ill-conceived licensing proposal, these interest groups will proceed to other states with the message that Nebraska is seriously investigating instituting an EST license. They will approach small and medium sized business people in Nebraska and state that they ought to invest in this training program now, because Nebraska is looking at mandating it, and other states are sure to follow.

InfoComm respectfully asks this committee to reject this call to study instituting an EST licensing program because there is no salient public policy reason to do so. It is a solution in search of a problem. Since I have a deep-seeded belief that common sense is the hallmark of Nebraskans, I believe that upon hearing from more people and industries today you will see that this proposal has little to do with safety or quality education, but is instead an attempt to force Nebraska businesses to accept the EST program it has rejected in the free marketplace. InfoComm is ready to work with the state of Nebraska on legitimate licensing or workforce development programs.

Thank you for your kind consideration.