

Let's all get serious about safety. Let's all get certified. Now.

THE ENTERTAINMENT TECHNICIAN CERTIFICATION PROGRAM (ETCP) is the best thing to happen to rigging since aluminum truss. I only want to work with—and more importantly under—ETCP Certified Riggers. I have prodded, bribed, and otherwise coerced my staff to become certified; as a result we now have fifteen ETCP certified riggers on payroll and by January 2009 we will have more than three times that many with at least one ETCP certified rigger supervising every rigging call at the facilities we serve. I aim to have every rigger we employ certified by 2010.

“The Entertainment Technician Certification Program (ETCP) is the best thing to happen to rigging since aluminum truss.”

More than half of the events we provide rigging services on are small corporate events at luxury hotel convention centers where a two rigger call is all that is required. When you only have one up rigger and one down rigger on a call, I think it is imperative that both are competent professionals. ETCP certification does not guarantee that a rigger is suitable to work in an upscale hotel, but in my opinion, it is the best way to document that a rigger is experienced and knowledgeable.

Why aren't all riggers ETCP certified?

I think there are a few key reasons why all professional riggers have not yet taken the certification exam. The biggest reason is that, (1) **their employers have not given them an incentive to get certified.** Many of our riggers responded to the promise of a pay increase once they were certified. Some riggers may not respond to a financial incentive, but they may respond to other incentives. For example, we made special shirts for our ETCP certified riggers. The

shirts are made from a better material than our regular shirts and they have the riggers name and the ETCP logo on the sleeve clearly displaying that they are professional riggers committed to safety. For our riggers, a nicer shirt is a small incentive, but the idea that in the near future they may be the only rigger on the call that isn't ETCP certified and everyone will know it, may be a significant incentive.

Another reason is that, (2) **many riggers likely don't know what to do to get prepared.** As a result they don't take the exam because they're afraid they will fail. The ETCP is unable to provide direct training because the standards for certification programs require a separation be maintained between education and testing. The examination content outline on the program website is quite intimidating for many of the riggers I know. I think a fair amount of otherwise qualified riggers read the outline and see a few things listed that they do not have a full understanding of, and since they don't know where to turn for help, throw in the towel.

A less likely but possible reason why some qualified riggers may not be certified is because, (3) **they do not believe the certification program is even intended for them.** The ETCP website states that the program is intended for “the upper third of all riggers in the entertainment industry.” As an otherwise qualified candidate, it takes a fair amount of moxie to declare that you believe you are better than two thirds of your peers by signing up for the exam (especially when you consider how thin the air gets in the top third near Rocky and Harry).

Who is the Entertainment Technician Certification Program for?

I believe that all riggers who make decisions about what is and isn't safe should prove they are competent to make those decisions by passing the ETCP certification exam. Since all of the riggers

we employ make decisions on site that meet that criteria, we are requiring all of them to get certified. If you translate the eligibility requirements into hours, a rigger is eligible to take the exam once they have approximately *three years of rigging experience*. In my opinion, people with significantly less than the required experience should be considered assistants or apprentices, not riggers. After all, rigging is serious business with serious consequences and should be done by experienced, competent professionals only.

How should riggers prepare for the exam?

Every rigger I know, myself included, needed to do at least a little reading and a math refresher to brush up for the exam. For the riggers that need a little more than a little brush up, a list of industry seminars and bibliography information can be found on The ESTA Foundation website at www.estafoundation.org/seminars/resources.htm. The referenced website hosts a list of some sixty books, articles and ANSI standards. If you have the time and inclination, study all of those documents to prepare for the exam. If there is simply too much information out there to gather and not enough time in the day, ETCP recognizes training programs and trainers for renewal credits for those who already hold ETCP certification; but all of these can be used as pre-exam resources as well. The ESTA Foundation and USITT have recently launched a Joint Training Initiative whose goal is to bring training to a variety of locations around the country to make training more accessible. Visit their websites and watch for details as they come online.

For the professional riggers out there who want to become certified, but only need a little brush up, here is what I recommend. First, submit your application to the ETCP office and then follow the instructions to get yourself an actual test date at your local AMP testing site. That is the most important part of the process. After you have a date, download and print the formula sheet for the exam you plan to take from the ETCP website. Read *Entertainment Rigging* by Harry Donovan and use the ETCP formula sheet to solve the practice problems in his book. Then read *Stage Rigging Handbook* by Jay O. Glerum. If you are a competent, experienced, professional rigger, you will find everything you need to know in those two books.

When you are done reading, go to a load-in (off the call) and practice real world math problems using the ETCP formula sheet. Calculate the point loads for the entire show. Ask the production rigger to let you check your math against his paperwork. Use the Pythagorean theorem to figure out bridle leg lengths and then check your math against the actual leg lengths of the points that are hanging. Calculate horizontal and vertical forces on the beams as well as leg tensions in the bridles. Calculate the shock load if Tubby the Lampy fell off the FOH truss. Use his actual body weight and the lanyard lengths for your calculations. Inspect the wire rope ladder and fall protection system on the FOH truss and research the related ANSI and OSHA standards. Obtain and read the CM Loadstar operators manual cover to cover. Once you have your confidence up, take the exam—I bet you will pass. But even if you don't, there is an upside. Now you know exactly what you need to work on. When you do pass, offer to help a co-worker get prepared.



J&M Special Effects
 524 SACKETT STREET
 BROOKLYN, NY 11217
 718.875.0140
 www.jmfx.net

Smoke • Haze • Rain • Mist • Snow • Pyrotechnics • Theatrical Firearms • Trick Weapons • Breakaway Glass

What can venue managers and employers do to improve overhead safety?

Venue managers, if you require that vendors providing rigging services in your facility employ ETCP Certified Riggers in lead positions at a minimum, you can rest assured that there are knowledgeable, experienced riggers making the decisions that directly affect the safety of your staff and guests as well as the integrity of your building. You will be in good company. In fact, a few of our nation's largest

“Employers, please require that riggers making decisions that affect the safety of others demonstrate that they are competent to do so by passing the certification exam.”

convention centers and concert venues already require lead riggers to be ETCP certified. Your next step then is to make sure the riggers your vendors are sending onsite are ETCP certified. Unfortunately, there are a few companies out there that seem to be getting a very small percentage of their staff certified for ETCP Recognized Employer status but in practice send uncertified riggers on site. For the ETCP program to improve safety at your facility, you need to require that ETCP certified riggers are actually onsite rigging. To confirm that a rigger is certified, simply run their name through the Search for an ETCP Certified Rigger engine on the program website. All ETCP certified riggers are listed on that site, or you can ask to see their ETCP ID card. Remember, a little due diligence on your part goes a long way with a jury.

Employers, please require that riggers making decisions that affect the safety of others demonstrate that they are competent to do so by passing the certification exam. You will be in good company as well. In fact, there are more than eighty-two companies that have already committed to the program. Let's not lose sight of the fact that riggers only need a few years of experience and a passing score on a 150 question multiple choice exam to get

certified. That is not an unreasonable minimum requirement for the people we hire to hang thousands of pounds of equipment over people's heads.

ETCP is here to stay.

It is time for all professional riggers to stop making excuses, get their applications in, and get down to the nearest AMP testing center. For those of you presently working as riggers who are not experienced enough or don't have the skills to get certified at this point in your career, please tell your employer that you would like to work under the direct supervision of a professional ETCP certified rigger so you can develop the skills necessary to become a safe professional ETCP certified rigger. The life you save might be your own.

Let's all get serious about safety. Let's all get certified. Now. ■



Brad Kagel is President of National Production Services Inc., in Dallas, TX. NPS serves as the in-house rigging provider at more than thirty hotel convention centers in the South. NPS also serves as a Columbus McKinnon theatrical dealer and service center.

ETCP Infosession at LDI2008

Are you interested in learning what the Entertainment Technician Certification Program is all about? Have you heard the buzz at work or on the jobsite about ETCP Certification?

Council representatives will discuss the examination process, information and schedules, and answer questions from the audience. The panel will be moderated by Dennis Dorn, Professor at University of Wisconsin-Madison and USITT; Tim Hansen, with Oasis Stage Werks and ETCP Council Chair; Eddie Raymond, Vice-President of IATSE Local 16 and SME Co-Chair Rigging Skills; Bill Sapsis, President of Sapsis Rigging and SME Co-Chair Rigging Skills; and Ken Vannice, with Leviton and SME Chair Electrical Skills. Meredith Moseley-Bennett, ETCP Coordinator, will also be present to answer questions about registering to take the exams.

The Infosession will be held in room S108 on Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; candidate handbooks and applications will be available at the session. Come and find out for yourself how ETCP is making the industry safer everyday!

Save with **ESTA.** Period.



Credit Card Acceptance Discounts

**Lower the rate you pay to accept
Visa, MasterCard and American Express.**

Take advantage of ESTA's group buying power.

more information at:
212-244-1505
www.esta.org/benefits

ESTA
Building
the BUSINESS of
show Business