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BOARD MEETINGS:

February 15, 2012
May 2-3, 2012
August 15, 2012
October 17, 2012

BOARD MEMBERS:

Daniel D. Bennett, Chair
Marzette Fisher, V-Chair
Kristine A. Harding, Member
Charles E. Penuel, Member
Jim H. Seay, Jr., Member
Mac Walcott, Member

STAFF:

Cindy McKim
Executive Director

Bonnie Singleton
Executive Secretary

Debbie Whitman
Legal Research Assistant

SPECIAL EDITION: CHANGES TO ALABAMA'S CONTINUING EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Recently, the members of the Alabama Board of Architects voted to change continuing education requirements for renewal of an architect's registration in Alabama. The changes are part of a larger nationwide goal spearheaded by NCARB: greater standardization of continuing education requirements, simplified record keeping processes for state Member Boards of architecture, coupled with a reduced burden on architects licensed in multiple states.

Upon examination of the requirements of NCARB's Member Boards, it was determined that 46 jurisdictions have continuing education requirements for license renewal. Requirements range from 5 hours per year to 50 hours in five years. To complicate things further, these requirements are usually tied to a member board's renewal cycle, which varies widely nationwide.

NCARB committees composed of architects and Executive Directors of the Member Boards worked together in an effort to find common ground. As part of this important task, it was noted that 32 of the 46 jurisdictions require an average of 12 hours per year. Further collaboration resulted in a recommendation to "decouple" the time frame for earning continuing education hours from the renewal date, thus resulting in a standardized earning cycle that is not tied to the renewal date. Requiring that all 12 hours are related to health, safety, and welfare (HSW) ensures that continuing education hours are meaningful and focused on subjects that are critically important to competent practice.

Board Members of the Alabama Board of Architects participated in these committees over a period of years, and they support this important effort toward standardization of continuing education requirements across the United States and its territories.

So, how will these changes affect an Alabama licensee? The comparison chart below shows the significant changes:

CRITERIA	CURRENT REQUIREMENTS	RECENTLY ADOPTED REQUIREMENTS
Annual Hours Required	12	12
Annual Health, Safety, and Welfare (HSW) hours required	12	12
Learning Environment	8 structured (minimum), 4 self-directed (maximum)	12 structured (minimum)
Course content stipulations	HSW-related	HSW-related with suggested content areas
Earning cycle for continuing education hours	October 1-September 30 (or through date of renewal)	January 1-December 31
Renewal / reporting date	September 30	September 30
Record retention	One year from date reported on the renewal form	One year from date reported on the renewal form
Random audit verification?	Yes	Yes
Documentation evidence retained by registrant?	Yes	Yes
Exemptions	(a) Emeritus (b) First-time registrants (c) Civilian called to active military duty (subject to conditions) (d) Hardships (subject to approval by the Board) (e) Resident state	(a) Emeritus (b) First-time registrants (c) Civilian called to active military duty (subject to conditions) (d) Hardships (subject to approval by the Board)
Excess hour carry-over?	No	No
Remedy for disallowances?	Yes, within 60 days of notification	Yes, within 60 days of notification
Non-compliance penalties?	Yes	Yes

To view the revised regulation, please see Chapter 3 in The Architects Handbook, found on the Board's web site at <http://www.boa.alabama.gov> in the "Important Links" box.

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE RENEWAL PROCESS

In an effort to simplify the renewal process, changes to both the on-line and paper-based renewal processes will take effect with renewals due in 2012. The most significant of these is that licensees will NOT be asked to list their earned continuing education hours on the renewal form. Instead, the licensee will be asked to certify that he/she has complied with the continuing education requirements. As part of the certification, the licensee acknowledges that making a false statement to the Board will be grounds for disciplinary action.

A continuing education log will be made available for download on the Board's web site for use by licensees to conveniently track hours as they are earned. The log will also be used in the event a licensee is audited for compliance with the Board's continuing education requirements.

FAQs (FACTUALLY ANSWERED QUESTIONS)

When does the new regulation go into effect?

The regulation is legally effective on November 21, 2011 for renewals due in 2012.

When I submit my renewal in 2012, will I certify that I completed hours earned in calendar year 2011?

Yes. The Board understands that this will result in certifying some or all hours that were previously reported for renewals submitted in 2011. However, this is necessary in order to implement the new continuing education requirement that "decouples" the earning cycle from the renewal date.

So, when I submit my renewal in 2013, I will certify that I completed hours earned in calendar year 2012, right?

Yes. This is essentially the "full" implementation of the requirement.

Why do I have to wait so long to certify compliance with the continuing education requirement? Why can't I do it in December of the year they are earned?

The renewal date is set by State law and coincides with the State's accounting fiscal year. There are no immediate plans to change the September 30 reporting date.

What qualifies as health, safety, and welfare?

The Board's new regulation gives specific examples of health, safety, and welfare related subject matter. The examples are given as general guidance, and the Board does not pre-approve courses. If the licensee believes that he/she has earned continuing education hours that do not expressly fall in the categories outlined in the regulations, he/she must be able to explain the relationship of those hours to health, safety, and welfare if audited.

What qualifies as "structured" continuing education?

Structured hours are earned by personal contact or in a distance-learning environment. Examples include seminars, webinars, lunch-and-learn presentations, on-line courses, NCARB monographs, and the like. In the event the licensee is audited, it is the licensee's responsibility to provide documentation that supports completion of the hours.

Why did the Board eliminate "self-directed" continuing education activities?

In many instances, self-directed activities are unstructured and individually planned without a distinct learning objective. In our experience, these hours are not universally accepted for credit by all Member Boards and are difficult to substantiate during the audit.

Why was the “resident state exemption” eliminated?

The overarching goal of standardization is to have all states adopt the new standard; therefore, the “resident state exemption” will not be needed because licensees of all Member Boards will have the same requirements for earning cycle, number of hours, and learning setting.

What if my resident state does not adopt the NCARB model requirements?

Regardless of whether your resident state adopts the model continuing education requirement, you must comply with Alabama’s continuing education requirements to renew your license.

I am over 65 years old, and I don’t think I need continuing education any more. Why can’t I be exempt from the requirements?

If you are continuing to actively practice as an architect, you must complete the continuing education requirements expected of all licensed architects. If you are **retired** from practice, over 65 years of age, and have been licensed in Alabama for 10 consecutive years or more, you may be eligible for “Emeritus” Status, which exempts you from the continuing education requirements. Contact Bonnie Singleton for more information at (334) 242-4179 or Bonnie.Singleton@boa.alabama.gov.

Will the Board audit for compliance?

Yes. As in years past, if the licensee is selected for audit, he/she must provide documentation of 12 hours of HSW-related continuing education earned during the previous calendar year.

Is the AIA transcript acceptable as documentation in the event of an audit?

Generally, yes. The transcript must show the continuing education hours earned during the time frame being audited, and they must be HSW-related. It is important to note that there have been differences of opinion between AIA and state Member Boards regarding course content deemed allowable as health, safety, and welfare. If necessary for clarification, the licensee must be prepared to explain how the course content relates to health, safety, and welfare.

What other forms of documentation are acceptable as part of the audit?

Other acceptable forms of documentation include certificates of completion issued by the course provider, “sign-in” log provided directly by the course provider, and other correspondence or documentation provided directly by the course provider.

What if I can’t provide documentation of my continuing education hours?

Regulations require that the licensee maintain documentation of hours earned. Failure to provide documentation, if audited, may result in disciplinary action.



QUOTABLE QUOTE

Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.

--John F. Kennedy