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JATC's New Fire Alarm Upgrade Classes Combine Online Learning With Traditional Approach

The JATC offers fire alarm blended learning classes for both beginners and those with fire alarm experience.

Blended learning has arrived at the JATC, offering students more convenience and flexibility.

The JATC has recently offered three fire alarm blended learning classes in three separate locations, including Sacramento, Oakland and San Jose. These classes combine traditional classroom instruction with online assignments that students can complete from home around their schedule. The class is for members who are just starting to learn about fire alarm systems, as well as for members who have fire alarm experience.

The curriculum includes a hands-on lab, where the students build a small-scale fire alarm system utilizing the fire alarm trainers. Students who successfully complete the course receive a certificate indicating they have completed a 40-hour class. These hours can be used to renew the California Fire/Life Safety Certification.

Other components of the course include Fire/Life Safety certification preparation material, fire alarm history, fundamentals, initiating devices, notification appliances, wiring, system interfaces and safety control utilizing the National Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee's fire alarm curriculum.

For any questions about the fire alarm blended learning classes, please contact the JATC at info@norcal-jatc.com.



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Electrical Contractors
Association and the
International Brotherhood
of Electrical Workers of
Northern California.



PHOTO BY NICK ELIAS

JATC Instructor Chris Cowan Says Teaching Is A Calling, Not Just A Skill

Transitioning from an Electricians Mate in the Navy to a job as an instructor at the JATC is quite a career trajectory. For instructor Chris Cowan, the career arc rolled out pretty naturally, except for his first day of teaching at the JATC.

“Coming to this job in 2008, I didn’t have any experience with public speaking or teaching,” said Cowan. “I was nervous, but as the day went on a switch just kind of flipped and I went into auto-pilot mode. It wasn’t until everyone went home that I got butterflies in my stomach.”

Cowan teaches a variety of classes to both apprentices and installer/technicians at the JATC. For apprentices, his class load includes Code & Practices; Fire Alarm; AC and DC Theory; Nurse Call; Security; and Access Control. For instructor/technicians, Cowan teaches BICSI; VDV Exam Prep; CPR/First Aid; OSHA 10/30; Fire Alarm Systems; and Security Systems.



PHOTO BY NICK ELIAS.

Chris Cowan, JATC Instructor

Q: Tell us the highlights of your experience as an electrician.

A: I served in the Navy for 4 years as an Electricians Mate, Cargo Elevator Technician, Damage Control/Electrical Isolation Electrician and Electrical Tool Safety Officer. I joined IBEW Local 595 in 2004, where I worked on many communication systems. I graduated from the apprenticeship program in 2006 and became a JATC instructor in 2008.

Q: Why did you decide to become an instructor?

A: Someone I had a lot of respect for thought I would be a good instructor, and encouraged me to do it. I wasn't really too sure, but I decided to give it a shot.

Q: What parts of your experience helped prepare you for teaching?

A: Being in the military was helpful. While in the Navy, I was able to communicate and work with people from all over the country. That experience enabled me to polish my interpersonal and communication skills.

Q: What do you like best about teaching at the JATC?

A: I like being able to work with the apprentices, mentor them and help provide them with the skills they will need to succeed in life. I want to give them life knowledge as well as the skill set to help them personally succeed in the trade. I feel I am directly supplying quality people into the field.

Q: How do you try to motivate students to learn?

A: I want them to understand there is a direct correlation between what they learn in the

classroom and how far they can go in the industry. I always remind students that with sound and communication in particular, there are a lot of doors that can be opened with more education and a higher skill level. You get out of it what you put into it.

Q: What's your favorite subject to teach?

A: Fire alarm, because it is a life safety system. You are educating apprentices about a system that can potentially save lives. For that reason, it is a very rewarding system to install and our lab is outstanding.

Q: What kind of person should enter the apprenticeship program?

A: Anybody that is willing to learn and wants to work in the trade. I've had many different types of apprentices go through from various backgrounds and skill sets. All you need is a desire to succeed. The most important thing we are looking for from someone coming into the program is the same thing contractors are looking for: someone that can communicate well, that shows up every day, that is part of the team, and wants to learn.

Q: What is a future career path for apprentices?

A: Upon completion of the apprenticeship program, Sound and Communication installers can sharpen their skills as leads on jobsites. They can progress to technician, and then on to Senior Technician.

Q: What attributes do you think students are looking for in their instructors?

A: Someone they can relate to and someone who understands what they are going through in their fields. They want an instructor that can relate personal experiences from things he has experienced.

Q: Do you enjoy what you do as an instructor?

A: This is the best job that I've ever had. I really enjoy the team we have here. We are a small group and work really well together. Everyone has an open ear and we are bringing different ideas to the table about how to improve the program. I have enjoyed working with the apprentices and it has been more rewarding than I expected.

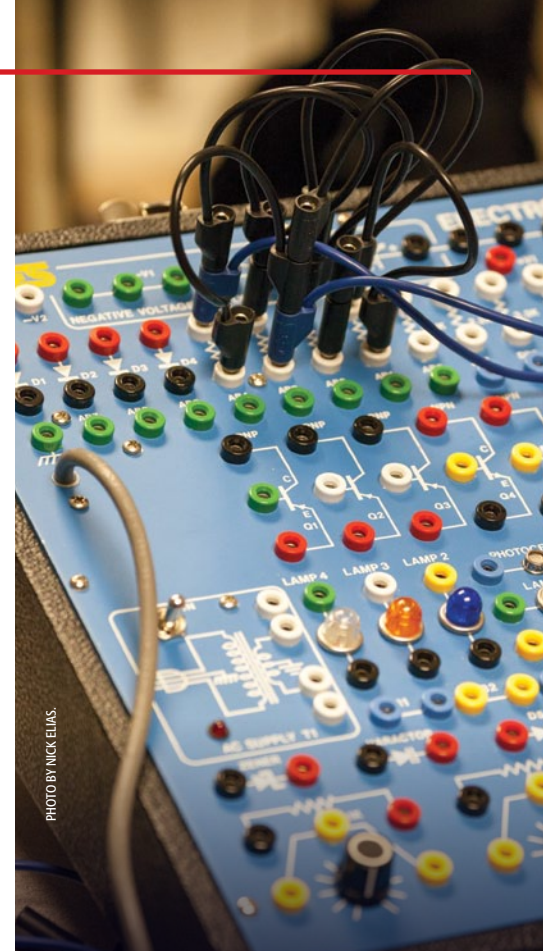
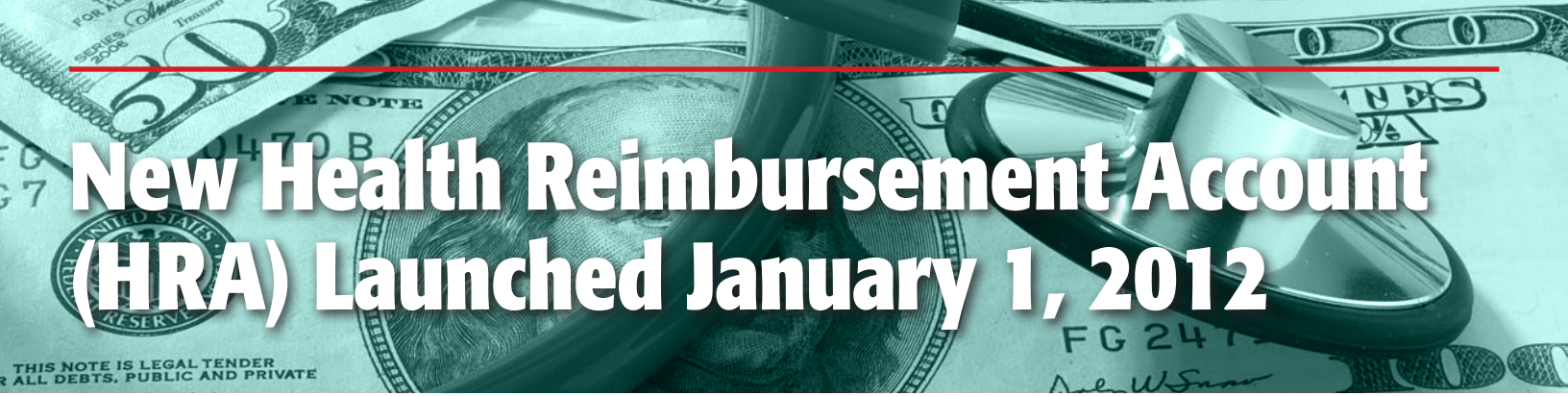


PHOTO BY NICK ELIAS.

Certification By The Numbers... Your Online Guide

Over 30,000 California electricians have been certified by the Department of Industrial Relations so far through the electrician certification program. For a current list of California certified electricians, go to http://www.dir.ca.gov/das/ECU_Stats.htm. You'll also find a number of other interesting statistics there, including the number of exams passed to date (over 54,000) and the number of exams taken to date (over 88,000). Check out the latest electrical certification statistics!



New Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) Launched January 1, 2012

Helping The Plan Work Better For You

Effective January 1, 2012, the Health and Welfare Plan includes a Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA). An HRA is an account that the Fund sets up and maintains on your behalf. Money in the HRA can be used to pay for certain healthcare related expenses.

As you know, your employer has been contributing \$0.25 per hour for a "Prefunded Retiree Plan" for the past 5 years. Unfortunately, this contribution was not sufficient to establish and fund a Retiree Plan. Instead, the Trustees have determined to use these funds to establish an HRA Plan, a reimbursement plan available to the extent that there are contributions in your account. Please note that the HRA Funds are part of the Trust and that an HRA Account balance is not a vested benefit.

HRA Plan

Basically, here's how the Health and Welfare Plan's HRA works:

When you work for a contributing employer, an HRA contribution will be made on your behalf and credited to your HRA for each hour that you work. Only employer HRA contributions made on your behalf are credited to your HRA; no additional voluntary contributions are allowed. The more you work, the more contributions are made to your HRA – and the more your account can grow.

HRA Expenses

You determine how to use your HRA; you can choose to:

Use it to pay for HRA eligible expenses or other expenses not covered by the Plan. HRA eligible expenses are reimbursed at 100%,

however you cannot use the HRA for the initial annual deductible; or use it to make self-payments to continue coverage when you are not working enough hours or to pay for healthcare premiums when you retire.

Your HRA may only be used to pay for eligible healthcare expenses that are not otherwise reimbursed. However, a range of expenses are eligible. You can obtain a list of eligible healthcare expenses on the Plan's website at www.soundcommbenefits.com or by contacting the Plan's Administrative Office.

HRA Eligibility

While contributions are only made on your behalf while you are working for a contributing employer, if money remains in your HRA at the end of a year, it rolls over into the next year, allowing you to use it for reimbursement of future expenses, such as the cost of continued coverage when you are not working enough hours or at retirement. In addition, your HRA balance is available to your surviving spouse and dependent children in the event of your death, provided they were covered as dependents under the Plan. However, if you have no medical qualified dependent upon your death, your HRA account balance will revert to the general assets of the Health and Welfare Trust Fund.

You continue to be eligible to use your HRA for reimbursement of eligible healthcare expenses for three years from the date work hours were last reported (that is, when you left covered employment; this does not apply to retirement). Retirement is satisfied by proof of retirement under the Social Security Act, NEBF,

IBEW District No. 9 Pension Plan or any other IBEW-NECA sponsored retirement plan. In the event of your death, your surviving spouse and dependent children will continue to be eligible for reimbursement of eligible expenses until the earliest of:

The date your HRA account balance reaches zero; the HRA terminates; or three years from the date work hours were last reported for you (however, this does not apply when hours are not reported due to retirement).

If you go on a qualifying leave under FMLA or USERRA, the Health and Welfare Plan will continue to maintain your benefits on the same terms and conditions as if you were still an active employee.

HRA Claim Procedure

Your HRA Account may only be used to pay for eligible healthcare expenses as defined by Internal Revenue Code (IRC) Section 213. To receive reimbursement for eligible expenses, you must submit a written claim form, with the required supporting documentation, to the Plan in accordance with the Plan's claim procedures. A HRA reimbursement claim form can be obtained on the Plan's website at www.soundcommbenefits.com or by contacting the Plan's Administrative Office at the phone number noted below.

The Plan's HRA will give you more flexibility in the way you meet your and your family's healthcare needs. We encourage you to take advantage of the Plan's HRA. If you have any questions about the HRA or the Plan in general, please contact the Plan's Administrative Office at 408.288.4452.

New AV Lab Equipment Provides Student Learning Opportunities

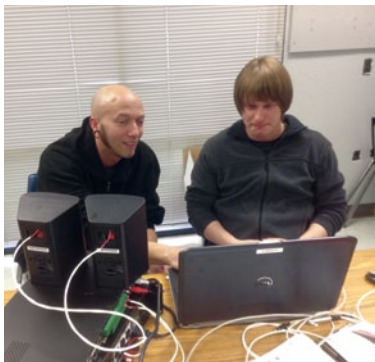
The JATC AV Lab has rolled out new audio visual hands-on equipment that gives students more options to learn various AV systems.

The equipment includes a series of new microphones (gooseneck, lavalier and boundary) as well as EAW digital signal processors (DSP), amplifiers and speakers.

Students are able to solder their own microphone cables and wire the system so they can try the various microphones to hear each one's tonal character. Students can also use a laptop computer to connect to the DSP and provide equalization and other features such as compression, priority status and logic inputs. The DSP units are then linked together to form an expanded system of microphones and speakers.



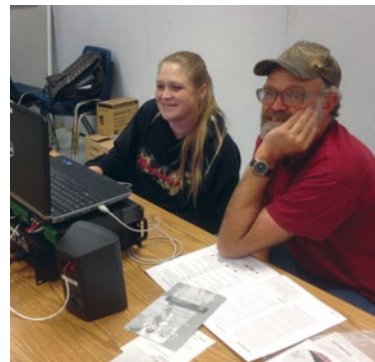
IBEW LU 340 Members Kathryn Benge, Brian Elliott and Ronald Iloff



IBEW LU 340 Members Jay Lynn and Maksim Andrianov



IBEW LU 595 Member Jesse Morton



IBEW LU 340 Members Sarah Perkins and Wayne Knifton

How to Download and Use the VDV Logo

The VDV brand is available for use on your marketing and communications materials. Visit www.norcalvdv.org and click on 'The VDV Brand' to download the logo. Your use of the VDV brand will help it grow in recognition and identify you as a qualified member of the Sound and Communications industry.

Safety Corner...

At MDE Electric Safety Is A Top Priority

We recently spoke with Paul Cadieux, Safety Coordinator and Assistant Project Manager at MDE Electric, to discuss the company's safety program.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MDE-ELECTRIC

**Paul Cadieux,
MDE Electric**

"We are very diligent about our safety walks and our instruction."

***Paul Cadieux,
Safety Coordinator
and Assistant Project
Manager, MDE Electric***

Q: How would you define the safety culture within your company?

A: MDE Electric is very safety oriented. Everyone is aware of what can happen on the jobsite if safety precautions are not implemented. We make sure everyone is fully informed.

Q: How do your employees feel about safety and do you think they see the value?

A: Our employees are extremely safety-conscious. They always wear their hardhats and their safety equipment. They make sure their tools are in working condition and that there are no cuts in the wires. We are checking scaffolding, and dust and debris to make sure the area is clean and clear. We are very diligent about our safety walks and our instruction.

Q: How do you think your customers view safety and do they see the value?

A: Our customers know very well the importance of safety, and the employees at MDE Electric know

the best way to completely eliminate accidents is by reducing them. Implementing awareness, particularly in the electrical field, instills confidence in each and every customer.

Q: How is safety implemented or reinforced with your employees?

A: We hold a safety meeting at the beginning of each job. All of the superintendents and safety coordinators attend and go over the safety challenges on the project. We also hold two safety meetings a month with our employees. Our foremen also meet at the job site once a week with the employees. I also walk the jobsite and double check everything. We have tailgate meetings once a month to review basic safety checks and review the safety requirements at the jobsite. We use the Aspen Solution safety instruction materials during our meetings, and frequently watch safety videos.

For more information about the MDE Electric Safety Program, contact Paul Cadieux at pcadieux@mde-electric.com or call 408.738.8600.



From Left to Right: Richard Herrington, Patty Becker and John Boncher.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CUPERTINO ELECTRIC

Safety Kudos To Cupertino Electric!

Signawest Promotes Safety At All Times

We recently spoke with Ron Kunkel, President of Signawest Systems, to discuss the company's safety program.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SIGNAWEST SYSTEMS

**Ron Kunkel,
Signawest Systems**

“On a daily basis, we remind each other of the importance of safety.”

**Ron Kunkel,
President,
Signawest Systems**

Q: How would you define the safety culture within your company?

A: I feel every one of our employees is aware of the importance of safety. It is part of our company culture. Every morning, our field staff reminds each other to think safety, identify unsafe work areas, maintain a safe work place and have a “safe day.” Safety is everyone’s business.

Q: How do your employees feel about safety and do you think they see the value?

A: Yes, our employees definitely see the value in safety. They feel they work as a team and if a team member were to miss work due to injuries, it would have a negative impact on the entire team performance. No one wants to be injured or to have an injury occur to a co-worker at the job site.

Q: How do you think your customers view safety and do you think they see the value?

A: Because we are a low voltage technology contractor, a large portion of our customer base also operates within the construction arena.

Whether they are electrical, mechanical or general contractors, we all operate in the same industry. Every company and each employee must be fully mindful of the hazards that are present in our work environment. As a total team we must all understand the significance of safety.

Q: How is safety implemented or reinforced with your employees?

A: We conduct weekly company job site tailgate meetings to discuss safety. We utilize material contained in our company safety training manual as a starting point. We encourage our employees to attend our customer’s job site safety meetings when possible. Our safety officer randomly visits our work sites to observe, grade, mentor and conduct safety meetings. When work permits, we bring the crew into the shop to conduct an in-depth safety meeting. If I had to pick a safety topic that is now emphasized by us, it would be ladder and fall protection safety. All of our field employees are OSHA 10 certified, and several have OSHA 30 certification.

For more information about the Signawest Systems Safety Program, contact Ron Kunkel at rkunkel@signawest.com or call 510.795.9999, ext. 101.

Cupertino Electric was awarded the 2011 Associated General Contractors of California (AGC) “Safety Awards of Excellence” in the category reserved for specialty contractors working more than 1 million hours in 2010.

Your Trust Fund Important Phone Numbers

Questions about eligibility for coverage, premiums, reserve accounts, and info booklets, call:

United Administrative Services

408.288.4400
Toll-Free 800.748.6417

Trust Self-Funded Medical Plan Trust Dental Plan

Questions about claim payment, claim forms and benefit info:
408.288.4400
Toll-Free 800.541.8059

Anthem Blue Cross PPO

www.anthem.com/ca
To locate a participating preferred provider physician, clinic, or hospital:
408.288.4400 or 800.541.8059
Refer to Group # 170016M001

First Dental Health Dental PPO

www.firstdentalhealth.com
To locate a participating preferred provider dentist:
Toll-Free 800.334.7244

Kaiser Permanente

www.kaiserpermanente.org
Questions about benefit info and ID Cards:
Toll-Free 800.464.4000
Refer to Group # 919

United Healthcare

www.UHC.com
Questions about benefit info and ID Cards:
Toll-Free 800.624.8822
Refer to Group # 402457

Optum Health

www.OptumHealth.com
Questions about mental health benefits or the member assistance program: 800.888.2998
Group # 10000824-0001, 0002

Vision Service Plan

www.vsp.com
Questions about vision benefits and vision claims or to request a Vision Plan Provider Directory:
Toll-Free 800.877.7195

To order additional copies
of The DATA contact
hannah@ahcommunications.com

Health and Welfare Plan PPO vs. NON-PPO

Under the IBEW/NECA Sound and Communications Health & Welfare Plan you may hear or see information about the Self-Funded Medical Plan option's Preferred Provider Organization (PPO). Terms such as "In-Network", "Out-of-Network" and "Out-of-Area" are important for you to understand because they represent what it means cost-wise to you and the Plan.

In-Network Care

In-Network (also called Participating, Contracted, Network and PPO) refers to health care providers who are contracted with the Plan's Anthem Blue Cross PPO Network and who are located within the service areas of the PPO Network. Health care providers who are under a contract with the Plan's Anthem Blue Cross PPO have agreed to accept a discounted amount for their services. This saves both you and the Plan money.

The Board of Trustees have contracted with Anthem Blue Cross for they offer the largest network of Health care providers in the State of California which provides ease of access to you and your dependents at highly discounted costs.

If you receive medical services or supplies from an In-Network health care provider that is contracted with the Plan's Anthem Blue Cross PPO, you will be responsible for paying less money out of your pocket.

Services provided In-Network are reimbursed at 80% with the exception of In-Network In-Patient Hospital charges which are reimbursed at 90% with a calendar year out-of-pocket maximum of \$2,500 per person (2 X per family).

Out-Of-Network Care

Out-of-Network (also called Non-Network, Non-PPO, Non-Contracted or Non-Participating) refers to providers who are not contracted with the Plan's Anthem Blue Cross PPO network, but who are located within the service area of the Plan's PPO network.

Out-of-Network health care providers may bill plan participants for any balance not payable by the Plan. Most services provided Out-of-Network are reimbursed at 80%, however, you are responsible for 20% of all expenses and there is no calendar year out-of-pocket

maximum. Also, some out-of-network services are not covered by the Plan such as Preventative Care Benefits like physical exams, well baby care, immunizations and vaccinations.

Out-Of-Area Care

Out-of-Area refers to Out-of-Network providers who are not contracted with the Plan's Anthem Blue Cross PPO network and who are located outside the service area of the Plan's PPO network.

Out-of-Area health care providers may bill plan participants for any balance not payable by the Plan. Most services provided Out-of-Area are reimbursed at 80% and again, there is no calendar year out-of-pocket maximum.

So whenever possible, go to In-Network providers and receive great health care at the best possible price.

To locate a participating Anthem Blue Cross PPO Health care provider, go online to: www.anthem.com/ca, select "Find a Doctor or Hospital" or "Providers." You can also contact the Plan's Administrative Office at: 408.288.4400, toll-free: 1.800.541.8059.

norcalvdv.org

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