



# CERTIFIED UTILITY SAFETY PROFESSIONAL CANDIDATE HANDBOOK



INCREASE YOUR VALUE  
WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION



GAIN INDUSTRY-WIDE RECOGNITION  
AS A SAFETY PROFESSIONAL



EXPAND YOUR CAREER  
GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES



EMPLOYERS ARE SEEKING  
CUSP CANDIDATES



MAKE VALUABLE CONNECTIONS  
WITH UTILITY SAFETY PROS



## ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK:

This handbook contains information that you will need to apply, register and prepare for the Certified Utility Safety Professional (CUSP) exam, including eligibility requirements, exam policies, exam content and exam preparation resources. Keep this handbook as a resource to refer to after you have registered for the exam.

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## INTRODUCTION

### CUSP CERTIFICATION

The Certified Utility Safety (CUSP) certification is a program of the Utility Safety & Ops Leadership Network (USOLN), a not-for-profit 501(c)6 organization formed for the purpose of creating a utility-specific safety credential. The CUSP certification was created to promote safety leadership in the utility industry through:

1. Formally recognizing those individuals who meet the eligibility requirements of the CUSP program and demonstrate competency through passing the CUSP exam.
2. Continuing personal and professional growth in the practice of utility safety leadership in order to maintain continued and growing competence in the discipline.
3. Creating a uniform standard of understanding utility safety regulations, competencies and task-directed skills for both utility companies and their contractor partners.
4. Providing employers the assurance of an individual's broad knowledge, skills and abilities in the utility work environment when hiring or promoting.

The CUSP certification is the only program that awards utility-specific safety credentials to meet the unique requirements of utilities and related contractors. The CUSP credential will be assigned to those who meet specific eligibility requirements and demonstrate competence by passing the CUSP exam.

### USOLN BOARD

The USOLN Board of Directors is the oversight body for the Certified Utility Safety Professional (CUSP) credential. It is responsible for all decision-making and every aspect of the operations of the certification program. The USOLN Board of Directors makes all policy decisions, rules on any disputes and assesses the effectiveness of the CUSP certification.



## CANADIAN CUSP PROGRAM

The CUSP credential is now available in Canada. The Utility Safety & Ops Leadership Network (USOLN) has provided the national framework for standardized utility safety professional certification, sharing of utility best practices, and opening up a wide network of industry professionals as a resource for advancing safety in the industry, in Canada, and internationally.

Given the variation in occupational health, safety, and utility regulations in the Canadian provinces, the focus of the Canadian CUSP program is the development of best practices with due consideration of the provincial internal responsibility systems. Best practices typically set the operational standards above provincial regulations. They also establish the most common methods to achieve operational success within the parameters of common regulations, provide work techniques inclusive of the collective trade experience, and debunk field-level work practices that counter those efforts.

However to achieve some level of synergy in the utility standards, information will be driven by CAN/ULC-S801-14 Standard on Electrical Utility Workplace Electrical Safety for Generation, Transmission, and Distribution. Some Canadian utilities are in the process of a gap analysis of CAN/ULC-S801 and the existing provincial electrical utility regulations. Various other CAN/ULC standards within S801 will also be referenced as standards applicable within the CUSP program. The remaining body of knowledge and standards will be referenced from multiple benchmark standards like CSA, ASTM, and NFPA to name a few. The purpose of these selected standards is to have a common source of practices that are referenced as standards within provincial regulations.

The CUSP exam in Canada will contain information and standards relevant and inclusive of all common provincial practices. There is no reference to specific provincial or territorial regulations. The standards portion of the program will be based on an understanding of what the provincial and territorial regulations have in common as baseline practices. The scenarios presented within the body of knowledge will be better understood by those persons already practicing health, safety, and work methods within the utility industry. This is important as the CUSP program was created to develop an experienced group of safety professionals already working within utility operations.

Please refer to more information about the CUSP program in Canada on the USOLN website at this link: [usoln.org/cusp-certification/canadian-cusp](http://usoln.org/cusp-certification/canadian-cusp).



## CUSP EXAM AND ENDORSEMENTS

### OVERVIEW

The CUSP exam is designed to test a well-defined body of knowledge representative of professional practice in the discipline of utility safety. Successful completion of the CUSP exam demonstrates competency and broad-based knowledge of the utility safety profession.

The format of the exam is an online timed test. In order to prepare for the online exam, please review the [CUSP Online Exam Instructions](#). The CUSP Green and Blue base exams are comprised of 100 multiple-choice questions. In addition, all candidates will be asked to designate an endorsement exam, which consists of 30 questions, from the following utility work environments:

- Electric Transmission & Distribution
- Gas
- Power Generation
- Civil
- Utility Line Clearance Arborist

You must pass both the CUSP base exam and at least one endorsement exam in order to pass the CUSP exam.

### EXAMINATION SECURITY

Please note that the CUSP program takes exam security very seriously. The online CUSP exam is remotely proctored and all exam sessions are visually and audibly monitored, recorded and reviewed. The questions and content are highly confidential and are not to be shared, discussed or reproduced in any way. Any test taker who is suspected of engaging in conduct that jeopardizes the security or validity of the CUSP exam may have his or her score invalidated, may be denied future access to the exam and may face civil or criminal liability. Please review the [Exam Integrity Guidelines](#).

### CUSP EXAMINATION CONTENT

The following matrix on page 6 provides an outline of the content you will find in the CUSP exam. The top level is the main subject matter topic or domain. Below that, you will find a more detailed list of knowledge areas that are included in that domain on the exam. The matrix also includes the weighting of these topics for both the CUSP Green and Blue exams.

	CUSP Green	CUSP Blue
<b>STANDARDS:</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>15%</b>
1. OSHA Federal Regulations		
2. Cranes and Derricks in Construction		
3. Performance and Consensus Standards		
4. OSHA Record-keeping Requirements		
5. Certification or Qualification		
6. Legal Considerations		
7. Enforcement Policies of Regulatory Agencies		
8. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR)		
9. Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)		
<b>HAZARD ID:</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>
1. Typical Workplace Hazards		
2. Hazards vs. Risks		
3. Responsibilities		
4. Common Utility Industry Practices		
5. Monitoring		
6. Evaluating Program Effectiveness		
<b>INCIDENT PREVENTION:</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>10%</b>
1. Define Incident Prevention		
2. Fundamentals of Incident Prevention		
3. Tracking and Interpreting Incidents		
4. Incident Investigation		
5. Typical Incident Prevention Programs		
<b>LEADERSHIP SKILLS:</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>35%</b>
1. Communicating Safety Values and Expectations		
2. Identify/Explain Critical Safety Data Measurements		
3. Safety Program Accountability		
4. Defining Critical Behavior		
5. Proactive vs. Reactive		
<b>HUMAN PERFORMANCE:</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>5%</b>
1. What is Human Performance?		
2. Recognizing Active and Latent Errors		
3. Understanding Latent Organizational Weaknesses		
4. Anatomy of Events		
<b>OPERATIONS:</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>20%</b>
1. Operations Responsibilities and Accountabilities in the Safety Process		
2. Understanding the Difference Between Compliance and Safety		
3. Building Effective Relationships		
4. Implementing Operational Practices		
5. Gap Analysis		



## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The CUSP Program has two pathways: CUSP Green, for those who are in a dedicated utility safety or training leadership role and CUSP Blue for those in a utility operations leadership role.

[To be eligible for the CUSP exam](#), candidates must fulfill the following requirements:



### CUSP GREEN – SAFETY/TRAINING MANAGEMENT

- At least 36 months of experience in a dedicated safety or training leadership role in the utility industry.



### CUSP BLUE – OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT, SUPERVISOR, FOREMAN

- At least 36 months of utility operations leadership experience
- At least 1 year in a role where safety activities are a part of the job description, e.g., tailboards, safety committees, safety meetings



## APPLYING FOR THE CUSP EXAM

### CUSP APPLICATION PROCESS

The following steps outline the application process:

**1. Complete & Pay for the Online CUSP application, which is available at [usoln.org](http://usoln.org).** The USOLN reserves the right to verify information supplied by or on behalf of a candidate. Any misrepresentation of information shall be considered grounds for prohibition from testing or revocation of CUSP certification. An application is considered complete only if all information requested is included and accurate.

**Required information includes:**

- Contact information
- Utility work and safety experience
- Check the boxes in the attestation statement\*
- Signature

**2. Submit the Online application.** The application will be processed and the CUSP Application Review Committee will review each application to determine eligibility. A confirmation notice of approval to take the exam is sent via email within approximately two weeks.

**3. Once you receive confirmation of the approval of your application, each CUSP candidate must register and pay for the CUSP exam on the USOLN website at [usoln.org](http://usoln.org).** A link to pay will be sent in the confirmation email. Your application is valid for six months after it has been approved. After six months, if you have not taken & passed the CUSP base and endorsement exams, you will be required to submit a new application and pay the application fee again.

### STATEMENT OF NONDISCRIMINATION

The CUSP program does not discriminate among candidates on the basis of age, gender, race, color, religion, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or military status.

## CUSP EXAM FEES

### CUSP EXAM ONLY

CUSP exam only (includes base exam + one endorsement).  
CUSP Prep not included.

### CUSP PREP + EXAM

Includes CUSP Prep and CUSP exam  
(base exam and one endorsement).

*If you have already purchased the CUSP Prep,  
then you'll want to choose the CUSP Exam Only option.*

USOLN Member	Non-Member
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\$400	\$524
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Additional Endorsements

\$190 each

USOLN Member	Non-Member
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\$1,199	\$1,523
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Additional Endorsements

\$190 each

**CUSP Application Fee:** \$80 Non-Member / \$60 USOLN Member  
**Each exam retake (base or endorsement)** \$100 for Members & \$125 for Non-Members



## **SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR CANDIDATES WITH DISABILITIES**

USOLN complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and makes every effort to ensure that no individual with a disability is deprived of the opportunity to take the CUSP exam solely by reason of that disability. USOLN will provide reasonable accommodations for candidates with disabilities. If you require special accommodations due to a disability, please submit the online [ADA Special Accommodation Request Form](#) and the additional documentation that is required along with your CUSP application.

## **ELIGIBILITY APPEALS**

Candidates who are denied eligibility may appeal this decision. Contact the CUSP certification department within 30 days of the decision and communicate that you are appealing the decision. Submit the online [CUSP Appeals Request Form](#) along with a revised CUSP application or additional information to [certification@usoln.org](mailto:certification@usoln.org) and it will be resubmitted to the CUSP Application Review Committee for reconsideration.

## CUSP PREP

CUSP candidates are encouraged to prepare for the CUSP exam by reviewing the resources available on the USOLN website. The CUSP Prep is an additional optional tool to help prepare for the exam. While the CUSP exam is designed to test a candidate's competence as a utility safety professional gained through experience and training throughout his/her career, reference materials and tools are provided to study as needed.

## EXAM PREPARATION

The USOLN does not require a CUSP candidate to participate in any education or training in order to take the CUSP exam. It does not recommend or endorse any particular CUSP exam prep or review course. The iP Institute offers the optional CUSP Prep as a tool to help prepare for the CUSP exam. The CUSP Prep was developed independently from the CUSP exam and everything that is on the CUSP exam is not included in the CUSP Prep. Making use of the CUSP Prep is not a guarantee that you will pass the CUSP exam. The CUSP credential is awarded solely by meeting the CUSP eligibility requirements and passing the CUSP exam.

## AFTER THE EXAMINATION

### NOTIFICATION OF EXAM RESULTS

All examinees will be notified by email if they pass or fail the CUSP exam. Grading of the CUSP exam is pass/fail and letter grades or specific scores will not be issued or disclosed. Examinees who pass the CUSP exam will be sent their CUSP certificate and wallet card within six to eight weeks. Those who fail can retest on a future online testing date should they choose to do so.

### RETESTING

A CUSP candidate must pass both the CUSP Green or Blue base exam and at least one CUSP endorsement exam in order to be awarded the CUSP credential. If a CUSP candidate fails to pass the CUSP base and/or endorsement exam, they can retake the CUSP exam(s) on a future online testing date. There is a \$100 for Members and \$125 for Non-Members.

## APPEAL OF RESULTS

The CUSP program employs a rigorous process to ensure the accuracy of CUSP exam scores. The online exams are scored electronically and the opportunity for error is highly unlikely. However, if you have a dispute of any kind, please submit your appeal using the online [CUSP Appeals Request Form](#) within 30 days of receiving your results.

## NAME OR ADDRESS CHANGES

We need to communicate with you in the future regarding your CUSP credential.

As a CUSP candidate or credential holder, it is your responsibility to inform the USOLN of any changes to your current contact information, including mailing address, email address and phone number. You are at risk of losing your CUSP credential if we cannot reach you with important notifications regarding your certification. Please update your USOLN profile online or send any contact information changes to [certification@usoln.org](mailto:certification@usoln.org) or call 815-459-1796.

## CUSP MAINTENANCE AND RECERTIFICATION

Your CUSP credential is valid for a two-year period beginning on the day that you become certified. In order to ensure the continuing competence of CUSP credential holders, the CUSP certification has established a recertification program that includes a continuing professional development requirement along with an annual maintenance fee of \$160 for USOLN Members and \$180 for non-members.

### CUSP ANNUAL MAINTENANCE FEE

The CUSP annual maintenance fee of \$160 for USOLN Members and \$180 for non-members is due each year on the anniversary date that you earned your CUSP. You will receive an email reminder notice. The CUSP annual maintenance fee can be paid online on the USOLN website.

### CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENT

**CUSP Green & CUSP Blue** credential holders are required to earn 30 CUSP points over a two-year time period.

### CUSP MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES

The [CUSP Points Maintenance Guidelines](#) on the USOLN website are provided to inform you of the different types of continuing professional development activities that are eligible for CUSP points.

## PROCESS TO REQUEST CUSP POINTS

1. As you complete continuing professional development activities, complete the online CUSP Points Request Form that can be accessed on the [recertification page of the USOLN website](#) or by logging into the [Community Hub](#).
2. Provide appropriate supporting documentation to verify your request. Electronic files can be uploaded into the online form. Supporting documentation might include:
  - Safety Education – copies of certificates, cards, transcripts or registration forms
  - Publications/Presentations – copies of presentations or publications
  - Professional Development Conference – copy of event registration and agenda/description of conference
  - Safety Meetings – copies of sign-in sheets, meeting agendas or minutes
  - Volunteer Service – a letter from the organization documenting the dates, number of hours and descriptions of the service provided
3. Submit the online CUSP Points Request Form. You will receive an acknowledgement that your request has been received and confirmation of the number of CUSP points awarded within 5 business days. For further information, visit the [USOLN Recertification Guide](#).

## PRIVACY POLICY

The USOLN will keep all CUSP candidate and credential holder personal and examination records confidential and will obtain your approval before releasing information from your CUSP records other than the cases listed below.

- The name only of each CUSP credential holder will be published in the CUSP Roster on the USOLN website.
- The USOLN will announce all new CUSP credential holders along with their companies on LinkedIn.
- If the USOLN receives an inquiry, we will provide verification of your certification to the public.



## USE OF THE CUSP CREDENTIAL

The CUSP credential is only for the authorized use of the individual to which it has been awarded. The “Certified Utility Safety Professional” title and the letters “CUSP” can be used anywhere that you use your name such as resumes, business cards, correspondence and email signatures.

Examples of correct use of the CUSP credential:

- John P. Smith, CUSP
- John P. Smith, Certified Utility Safety Professional

The CUSP credential is only authorized for use during the period the certification is valid; it expires if you have not met the recertification requirements and your CUSP credential is revoked. Use of the CUSP beyond the period that it is valid is considered unauthorized use.

The CUSP credential is recognition that you have achieved a high standard of safety knowledge and skills in the utility industry. It is something to be proud of and any use of the CUSP credential or the USOLN name in a disparaging or misleading way is strictly prohibited. Misrepresenting the scope of your CUSP credential is also strictly prohibited.



## APPENDIX

### STANDARDS OF ETHICAL CONDUCT

The Utility Safety & Ops Leadership Network (USOLN) has adopted the following Standards of Ethical Conduct to promote and maintain the highest standards of utility safety leadership and personal conduct among its members. These standards serve to assure utility industry confidence in the integrity of utility safety leaders. Ethical leadership is expected from members of USOLN. These principles are intended to strengthen our critical safety mission. However, they will not cover every situation or challenge that one may face. The following principles shall serve as guidance in making sound, ethical decisions in both business relationships and the routine execution of our professional duties.

USOLN members shall use the following ethical guidelines and as a member in good standing shall pledge themselves to the following Standards of Ethical Conduct:

- Obey all applicable laws
- Honesty, fairness, acting with responsibility and integrity
- Open, candid communications
- Mutual respect and trust for each individual and company one deals with
- Proactive dispute resolution
- Promise only what can be delivered
- Refuse to offer or accept gifts, favors, or entertainment that obligates or appears to obligate me to act in any way contrary to ethical business practices and avoid compromise of professional judgment by conflicts of interest
- Proper management of confidential and/or proprietary information as it applies to each unique business relationship
- Conduct professional relations by the highest standards of integrity
- Refuse to engage in negative communications either privately or publicly that disparage other individuals or entities of the triangle
- Act in a manner free of bias with regard to religion, ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, sexual orientation or disability
- Encourage all businesses within my sphere of influence to adopt these principles
- Seek opportunities to be of constructive service in civic affairs and work for the advancement of the safety, health and well-being of the community and our profession by sharing knowledge and skills

I understand that it is my solemn responsibility to demonstrate the content as well as the spirit of this document within my industry and profession.

## FAQ

### 1. What is the difference between a certification and a certificate program?

A certification, such as the CUSP credential, is developed to assess an individual's competence, i.e. knowledge, skills and abilities that they have gained through their job experience and education throughout their career against an established standard. A certificate program begins with education and training that is delivered and a certificate is awarded after an assessment is done to document the achievement of the learning objectives or mastery of the material.

### 2. Can I be grandfathered into the CUSP program without taking the CUSP exam by virtue of earning another certification or my long length of service as a utility safety professional?

No, each person must pass the CUSP exam in order to be awarded the CUSP credential.

### 3. Why are the CUSP maintenance and recertification requirements so rigorous?

Utility safety is a matter of life or death and it is critical for utility safety professionals to stay current with leading edge safety practices. In order to ensure the continued competence of CUSP credential holders, a rigorous maintenance and recertification program was developed that encourages ongoing continuing professional development.

### 4. Will there be a benefit to me in my career for earning the CUSP credential?

While nothing is guaranteed, many people have reported that the CUSP credential has provided them additional credibility in the workplace and helped them to advance in their careers. There are also employers that require the CUSP credential when they are recruiting new hires.

