

Certification should start at the front door

Security guards are the face of our profession. Their skills should be tested, kept current, and paid for by the people who depend on them.

The front line, by the numbers

328,000

Estimated licensed security guards in Canada at the end of 2024. Roughly four times the 75,107 police officers counted in 2025.

2.6 years

Estimated average time a guard stays licensed. Most leave after one licence term.

0 to 54 hrs

Basic training needed for a licence, depending on the province or territory. Some require none.

20+ a day

Estimated assaults on security guards in Canada. There is no official national count.

Guard estimates: Canadian Association of Security Professionals (2026); read them as warning lights, not exact counts. Police count: Statistics Canada (2026).

A licence is the floor

- Ontario: at least 40 hours of training, with emergency first aid
- One provincial test before the first licence
- A legal code of conduct: honesty, equal treatment, no unnecessary force
- **It shows a person may work, not that they are ready for every post**

Certification builds the career

- Tested against a shared body of knowledge
- Renewed on a schedule, so skills stay current
- A clear ladder from guard to supervisor to leader
- **It gives clients and the public a standard they can check**

A Canadian pathway, from first shift to leadership

1

Provincial security guard licence

Required by law. The starting line.

2

Accredited Canadian Security Professional Program

45 hours online. Level 2 adds 40 hours of in-person Canadian content.

3

Certified Protection Officer

International certification after 6 months of full-time work. Renewed every 2 years.

4

Certified in Security Supervision and Management

For supervisors and emerging leaders.

The RISE Program, Toronto. Resilient Individuals in Security Employment, with Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services, pairs a licence with a 40-hour, in-person, trauma-informed course in incident response and conflict management before anyone starts a work placement. Training, then a job, then a career.

Before you hire a security company, ask:

1. What training do your guards have beyond the licence?
2. Who pays for it, and is it on paid time?
3. What standard is that training measured against?
4. How do you keep their skills current?

Walter Chan, Certified Protection Professional. Volunteer Director, International Foundation for Protection Officers Canada. Written in a personal capacity. Sources are listed in the article.

Certification Should Start at the Front Door

Canada relies on more than 300,000 licensed security guards, yet in much of the country we ask them to prove very little. If our profession wants public trust, it has to invest where the public actually meets it.

By Walter Chan, Certified Protection Professional | October 2026

Think about the last time you dealt with private security in Canada. It probably was not a consultant or a security director. It was a guard: the person at the hospital entrance at 2:00 in the morning, the one who asked you to step back on a transit platform, or the one who helped a lost child find a parent at the mall.

To most Canadians, that person is the security industry. Yet entry requirements vary sharply across Canada. In some jurisdictions, a person can enter licensed security work without mandatory formal pre-licensing training.

In September, Eric Sean Clay, president of the International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety, published a column arguing that clients who hire outside security consultants should [ask about their certifications before anything else](#). He is right, but the question should not stop with consultants. Clients should ask it of the leaders of the security companies they hire, too. And it should not stop in the office. If certification matters for the people who write security plans and run security companies, it matters at least as much for the guards who carry those plans out, often alone, often at night, and often with no backup.

Often first on scene

Canada does not publish a single official count of security guards. The best current estimate comes from researcher Roy Jensen, who gathered licensing data from provinces and territories, including through freedom-of-information requests. His analysis estimates [about 328,000 licensed security guards at the end of 2024](#), with substantial uncertainty, because the jurisdictional data are inconsistent and incomplete. That is roughly four times the [75,107 police officers Statistics Canada counted as of May 15, 2025](#).

Guards are often first on scene and are expected to manage a situation until police, fire or paramedics arrive. Jensen also notes that municipalities are increasingly hiring guards for work once done by police, such as foot patrols, monitoring public spaces and responding to alarms.

These numbers deserve care. Jensen found significant inconsistencies in the provincial and territorial data. He also leads the Canadian Association of Security Professionals, which advocates for more training, and he discloses that role in his paper. Even with that uncertainty, the estimate shows that guards form a very large frontline workforce, and they are where the public meets security every day.

What a licence proves, and what it does not

Ontario requires standardized basic training and a provincial licensing examination. Basic training must be [no less than 40 hours when emergency first aid is included](#). Once licensed, guards must follow a legal [Code of Conduct](#) that requires honesty and integrity, equal treatment without discrimination, and no unnecessary force.

Requirements vary sharply elsewhere. Jensen's review found jurisdictions with no mandatory pre-licensing training, while others require basic programs of roughly 32 to 54 hours. Some jurisdictions do not operate the same security guard licensing model at all.

There is also a new gap at the national level. Canada has a [National Standard of Canada for security officers and supervisors](#) that includes a basic pre-assignment training program. As of April 1, 2026, the Canadian General Standards Board [no longer offers standards development or conformity assessment services](#), although its standards remain available at no cost through its catalogue. The standard is still there. The federal body that kept it current has stepped back.

At its core, a licence confirms that a person meets the jurisdiction's legal requirements to work. It does not, by itself, tell a hospital, a school board, a shelter or a condominium board whether that person is ready for every assignment, can calm a crisis, write a report that will stand up in court, or notice their own bias in a tense moment.

What the gap costs

The costs show up in three places.

First, people leave. Using licensing and renewal data, Jensen estimates an average security guard career of about 2.6 years. He also reports that guards often feel unprepared after basic training, and suggests that better training could build confidence and help keep people in the profession.

Second, people get hurt. The Canadian Association of Security Professionals estimates that [at least 20 security guards are assaulted every day in Canada](#), while also noting that Canada does not collect official national statistics on these assaults. One of its two methods extrapolates from incidents reported by a single local news site in Sault Ste. Marie, so the figure is best read as a warning light, not a census. Even one assault a day would be too many.

Third, public trust suffers. In a 2005 [Ontario human rights settlement](#) involving the Toronto Coach Terminal, a security company agreed to provide ongoing human rights training to its officers, and the Toronto Transit Commission agreed to require companies bidding for security contracts to guarantee that their staff were trained on human rights and racial profiling. Clients have been learning for twenty years that the guard at the door represents their brand too.

The brand on the badge

Every guard is a brand ambassador three times over: for their employer, for the client whose name is on the building, and for the whole profession. When a guard handles a tense moment with calm and respect, people trust security a little more. When a guard gets it wrong, the headline rarely names the company. It just says, "security guard."

That is why I believe certification should begin on the front line, not end in the manager's office.

Who should pay

If guards carry the brand, the brand owners should invest in them. Asking guards to pay out of pocket is neither fair nor realistic. Job Bank lists a [median wage of \\$19.00 an hour](#) for security guards and related security service

occupations in the Toronto region, drawn from 2023 and 2024 Labour Force Survey data, while Ontario's general minimum wage [rose to \\$17.95 an hour on October 1, 2026](#).

Many people enter this work as students, as newcomers to Canada, or while rebuilding their lives. They are the backbone of the industry. A fair approach looks like this:

- Employers and clients pay for certification, not the guard.
- Learning happens on paid time.
- Programs give credit for past learning and lived experience.
- Training uses plain language, flexible formats and, where possible, more than one language.
- New credentials lead to better pay and a clear path to promotion.

Where I stand, and what we are building

I should be clear about my own stake. I am a volunteer Director of [the International Foundation for Protection Officers Canada](#), the Canadian division of the International Foundation for Protection Officers. I refer to it below as the Foundation. Readers should weigh my view with that in mind, just as they would weigh any association leader's view of their own credentials.

With that on the table, here is the pathway the Foundation offers in Canada, built from the front line up:

1. [The Accredited Canadian Security Professional Program](#). A 45-hour online program covering the roles and responsibilities of the security officer, asset protection, emergency evacuation, professional ethics and report writing. It ends with a comprehensive final examination and a certificate of completion. It suits people new to the industry, employer-sponsored groups and guards who want a refresher. It is delivered by Smart Horizons, which the [International Accreditors for Continuing Education and Training lists as an accredited provider](#). In plain terms, that accreditation applies to continuing education units. The program does not replace a provincial licence.
2. Level 2 of the Accredited Canadian Security Professional Program: the Canadian layer. The online program draws on an international curriculum. Level 2 adds 40 hours of in-person training grounded in Canadian and Ontario law and practice, the Incident Response and Conflict Management course, delivered by a training provider approved by the Foundation. It was launched first through the Resilient Individuals in Security Employment Program, known as RISE, described below.
3. [Certified Protection Officer](#). An international certification for officers with at least six months of full-time experience or one year of part-time experience. Holders [recertify every two years](#), which keeps their knowledge current.
4. [Certified in Security Supervision and Management](#). For security supervisors and managers, covering security operations management, field supervision, coordination and security department leadership.

These are not the only credible options. [ASIS International](#), the [International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety](#), community colleges and other Canadian associations all offer valuable programs. I would rather see a guard complete a credible program with meaningful assessment, and where appropriate an independent certification, than receive no structured professional development beyond licensing.

The RISE Program: training, then a job, then a career

The clearest example of this approach is the Resilient Individuals in Security Employment Program, known as RISE, a Toronto program delivered through [Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services](#). RISE is designed with the backgrounds and lived experiences of its participants in mind.

According to program materials prepared for Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services by [Step Training Inc.](#), an [Approved Training Partner](#) of the Foundation, participants move through a clear sequence. First, they qualify for an Ontario security guard licence. Next, they complete a five-day, 40-hour, in-person course in incident response and conflict management. The course covers legal authorities under the Private Security and Investigative Services Act, 2005, the Trespass to Property Act and the Criminal Code of Canada, along with professional de-escalation, resilience and mental health awareness, note-taking and report writing, situational awareness, and supervised practical skills testing, including lawful subject control taught within a use-of-force framework. It is delivered in plain language and in a trauma-informed way. Any authorization to carry or use equipment is a separate matter that rests with the employer and is outside this training. Participants need both a valid licence and the course completion certificate before they begin a workplace placement.

That is what "frontline first" looks like in practice: real skills, tested fairly, tied to real jobs.

The fair objections

Critics raise fair questions, and they deserve better than dismissal. Will certification cost too much? Are the examinations meaningful? Why invest in people who may leave within three years?

Here is my honest answer. I have not found strong public research showing that frontline certification, on its own, improves outcomes. So let us measure it. Employers and clients can track complaints, use-of-force incidents, injuries and retention before and after certification, and share what they learn. Frontline guards and their unions should help design the programs. Nobody knows the work better.

As for turnover: people who leave after two years still wore the uniform, still stood at the door, and still represented all of us. And if better training helps people stay, as Jensen suggests it might, the investment pays twice.

What I am asking

- Guards: ask your employer about paid certification and a clear career path.
- Employers: fund certification, put it on paid time, and link it to pay.
- Clients and buyers: before you sign a security contract, ask four questions. What training do your guards have beyond the licence? Who pays for it, and is it on paid time? What standard is it measured against? How are skills kept current?
- Governments, regulators, colleges, police and community partners: with the national standards body stepping back, work with the industry on a shared Canadian standard for the front line.

It's not the strongest that survives; it's the most adaptable. Our profession can adapt by raising the standard where the public meets it: at the front door. And we will do it the way this work always gets done. Strength in numbers.

About the author and disclosure

Walter Chan is a Certified Protection Professional (Lifetime Certificant) with more than 25 years of public-sector security experience in corporate security, corrections and critical infrastructure protection. He also holds the Certified Protection Officer, Certified Protection Officer Instructor and Certified in Security Supervision and Management certifications, and teaches part time at the college level.

Disclosure: he is a volunteer Director of the International Foundation for Protection Officers Canada, whose programs are described in this column, and he is involved in the certification pathway connected to the RISE Program. He is also a volunteer Director of the International Society of Crime Prevention Practitioners. He writes in a personal capacity. His views do not represent any employer or organization.

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