

## **For those interested in obtaining a California Pyrotechnic Operator License, Rockets Class 3**

For club launches using only commercial motors listed by the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) as high power motors, the launch activities must be under the observation and control of a Licensed Pyrotechnic Operator, Rockets (CalPyro).

A third class license, which is what this document is about, is sufficient for commercial motor club launches such as ROC launches. It is limited to commercial motors listed by the OSFM.

A Second Class license adds self-made motors like those used at Tripoli Research launches.

A First Class license includes all hobby and amateur rocketry activity.

### **These are the applicable excerpts of the CalFire regulations describing a CalPyro, Rockets Class Three, license:**

#### **§981.5. License Scope.**

(b) Pyrotechnic Operator. A Pyrotechnic Operator's License authorizes and places the responsibility for the handling, supervision and discharge of any fireworks item or pyrotechnic device and establishes that the operator is responsible for the training of his or her assistants in the safe handling, supervision, and discharge of these items and devices, in accordance with the following:

(6) Pyrotechnic Operator--Rockets Third Class may purchase, transport, store, and launch high power rockets. Experimental high power rocket motors may only be imported, exported, and wholesaled by individuals or companies holding valid import, export, or wholesale licenses. Pyrotechnic Operators--Third Class may only purchase high powered rocket motors from licensed wholesalers. Operators licensed under subsection (b) are also required to obtain a local permit from the authority having jurisdiction prior to all launches.

### **Where to Find Help:**

For mutual support and identifying who can provide letters of reference, I recommend joining the ROC-CalPyro email list before starting the actual process. There are current licensees and potential applicants on the list. We can answer questions about the process and generally compare notes:  
<https://www.freelists.org/list/roc-calpyro>

### **In A Nutshell:**

To initially obtain a CalPyro license there are a number of steps that must be completed. The actual exam is the last step and all other requirements must be met before an applicant is authorized to take the exam.

1. Completely fill out the application form (Links and more information is provided below.)
2. Gather at least five letters of reference on the CalFire Form
3. Have your fingerprints submitted and Live Scan form completed by the provider (see the bottom section of the form). The fee for this service varies widely.
4. Submit all of the above with a check for \$87
5. Wait for CalFire to notify you that your application has been approved and you may take the exam. They will also provide instructions on how to schedule the exam and where it may be taken. Last year the exam fee to Pearson-Vue was \$54 and is separate from other fees. Note that there is still some outdated exam information on the CalFire website.
6. Study for and pass the exam.
7. Wait for CalFire to send your license in the mail.

## In More Detail:

To start with, it is important to obtain the CalFire forms relevant to the license:

The license Application <https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/media/3063/application-for-pyrotechnic-operator.pdf>

The Live Scan Fingerprint form used for the background check  
<https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/media/3073/live-scan-form.pdf>

The reference letter form: <https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/media/3081/reference-letter-for-persons-requested-to-certify-an-examinees-experience-and-character.pdf>

You should also print a copy of the CalFire Handbook, which you should consider the only source of correct exam answers: <https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/media/3072/laws-and-regulations-for-transportation-use-and-storage-of-fireworks-in-california.pdf>

I recommend printing the handbook and keeping some post-it notes and highlighters on hand as you study. This handbook has a lot of information on various CalPyro Operator licenses, so it helps to mark the section applicable to the Rockets Class Three exam. The exam is similar in scope, detail, and difficulty to the NAR or Tripoli Level 2 exam.

I also recommend my study guide for the exam: <https://rocstock.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/calpyro-rockery-3-study-guide.pdf>

It is a good practice to download the **forms** directly from the CalFire website. We will keep the Study Guide and CalFire Handbook on the ROC website: <https://rocstock.org/learn/advanced/>

The application asks the applicant to describe their experience and training relevant to rocketry, as well as provide identifying information. The application fee is currently \$50 per year, plus \$37 to conduct the background check for an initial application. (This is separate from and does not include any fees paid to the Live Scan provider.) So an initial application must be accompanied by a check for \$87.

The Live Scan form must be completed and fingerprints submitted by an approved vendor or agency. These include most police and sheriff departments, and some commercial vendors and community organizations. Note that you will be responsible for any fees charged by the Live Scan provider. These vary widely and are in addition to the \$37 that CalFire charges to process the background check. For example the Barstow Police Department charged \$12. An adoption agency in Barstow also is a Live Scan provider, but they charge \$57 for the same service.

The five letters of reference are also required to accompany the application. Each letter must be from someone who can provide direct knowledge of your rocketry activities for at least the two years of experience you are required to have. These need to be from persons who can attest that you follow the applicable rules and regulations for launching in California. The contents of the letter are important and specific. Due to the very limited number of CalPyro Rockets licensees, they have said they will accept letters from individuals who are not currently licensed if they have the expected knowledge of your rocket experience. They prefer the form, but will accept other letters and additional pages can be attached.

**Here are the instructions to the person providing a reference letter:**

The person providing you with this certificate is requesting that you certify as to your knowledge of their experience, ability, character and integrity. Of particular concern is your knowledge as to his/her prior compliance with all State/local laws and regulations governing the use of pyrotechnics.

Your cooperation is requested so that the State Fire Marshal can determine whether an applicant has had the experience necessary to receive a Pyrotechnic Operators license. The person involved is required to verify that he/she meets all State Fire Marshal conditions necessary to take a pyrotechnic operator's examination. This verification is accomplished through your providing this certificate in support of their experience, ability, and character.

Certifications by former employers are the most desirable; however, any \*qualified California State Fire Marshal licensed person who has direct knowledge may certify to the examinee's experience. To be acceptable, the reverse side of this certificate must be completed and the statements therein certified to be true under the penalty of perjury. Our office will NOT accept Reference Letters, which are more than one (1) year old.

After the application and supporting forms are submitted, with the appropriate fee, CalFire will review the application and determine if the applicant is qualified. If you are found qualified then CalFire will end approval to take the exam and information on where and how to schedule it. Starting in 2019 CalFire has contracted with Pearson-Vue to administer the exam. They do charge a fee to sit for the exam, which was \$54 in 2019 when I took it. Once again, this is separate from and in addition to other fees.

When I applied the total cost was \$50 application fee, \$37 for background check, \$12 for Live Scan Fingerprints at the police department, and \$54 to Pearson-Vue for the exam. So the total cost was \$153, which may vary depending on where you get fingerprints and if any of the fees have changed since 2019.

Renewal requires only the \$50 application fee and a completed application form.

Renewals are accepted from January through May. After May 1 the fee increases. New license applications are not accepted in June due to renewal processing. Most review of applications and examinations take place after July 1.

The license term runs from July 1 to June 30, coincident with the state's fiscal year.

David Smith  
ROC Board Member  
CalPyro Operator, Rockets Class Three #12-3756