

**AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL MERIT BADGE COUNSELORS**  
**And to**  
**TROOP LEADERSHIP TEAMS**

I wanted to take a few moments to contact all of you and express my appreciation, and that of all members of the council advancement committee, as well as the staff of the council service center. We have made a lot of progress in providing a high quality merit badge program for our boys, and that's mostly because of the work you do and the ways you do your job.

We have had a number of questions that I want to answer in a public way so that everybody can have the same information. They all center on a similar area of concern: work done by the boy as a merit badge requirement, but done before you get to see him.

One very common way that this occurs is with a partial, often started at summer camp. As a merit badge counselor being asked to complete the badge requirements, you will be the one who signs the blue card at the end. It is your integrity that's on the line, as well as the boy's. You are not required to accept work done on a partial, at least not without checking the boy out to see if he can explain what he did and what he learned. If he can't then he should go back to work and do something to demonstrate to you that he has really accomplished what is signed on the blue card.

Closely related to this is the question of updated requirements. If a boy starts a badge under a current revision of the pamphlet, and the pamphlet is revised while his work is in progress, generally, he finishes under the revision that he started. National sometimes will publish an official statement saying that a given date is the last one for submitting completions under an old printing. Some of you may remember that when the exercise program for Personal Fitness went from 4 weeks to 12 weeks.

Another way that we are dealing with work done before we meet the boy is a little more challenging. The best way to explain it is with an example, or two.

**The Personal Fitness requirement says:**

"Outline a 12-week physical fitness program using the results of your physical fitness tests. Be sure your program incorporates the endurance, intensity, and warm-up guidelines discussed in the Personal Fitness merit badge pamphlet. Before beginning your exercises, have the program approved by your counselor and parents."

This means that if boy comes to see you the first time and shows you a detailed record of 12 weeks of exercises and test results every two weeks and shows improvement toward his goal - he still did not fulfill the requirement because you (and the parents) are supposed to approve the program before he starts.

**The Reptile and Amphibian requirement says:**

"Maintain one or more reptiles or amphibians for at least a month. Record food accepted, eating methods, changes in coloration, shedding of skins, and general habits; or keep the eggs of a reptile from the time of laying until hatching; or keep the eggs of an amphibian from the time of laying until their transformation into tadpoles (frogs) or larvae (salamanders)."

This is different. You don't need to be there at the beginning of this one. You should still examine the record carefully and be convinced that it is factual and that he has learned something from doing it.

The point is that some of badges do require your input or approval at the beginning of a long term project, and some don't. Please be aware of the case for the badges that you are approved for. If you aren't sure, read the book; if you're still not sure – ask.

I'd like also to bring out an important aspect of the merit badge program; it's one that we often tend to forget. It is not our job to pass as many scouts as we can in as little time as we can. Earning a merit badge, when it's at its best, involves a boy in a personal relationship with the material of the badge and with the person who walks him through it. That process - identifying the badge, identifying the counselor, taking the initiative to contact the counselor, and then working with that new adult - it's all a part of what can and should be happening. For some boys, some of those steps may be even harder than the subject material. Please don't dilute the program by taking that away.

That's only one of the reasons why we suggest only a few boys at a time, not a classroom full. You do your job best when the boy sees why and how this subject is important to you as an adult person, instead of seeing it as just another chore to be done on the way to getting a signature and a piece of colored cloth.

I hope this is useful for you. I know it is important to the leadership of the troop when the boy comes back with a signed blue card.

All of us want to be proud of what we do and we want to be certain of the integrity of the program.

The requirements are just that – requirements. We cannot require more; we cannot accept less.

If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact the Burlington County Council at either [toheyn@bsamail.org](mailto:toheyn@bsamail.org) or 609-261-5850x17.

Thank you again.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald J. Reardon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Donald J. Reardon  
Dean of Merit Badge Counselors