

The regulation of building construction is not a recent phenomenon. It can be traced through recorded history for over 4000 years. This provides evidence that people have become increasingly aware of their ability to avoid the catastrophic consequences of building construction failures.

In early America, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson encouraged the development of building regulations to provide for minimum standards that would ensure health and safety. Today, most of the United States is covered by a network of modern building regulations ranging in coverage from fire and structural safety to health, security and conservation of energy.

Public safety is not the only by-product afforded by modern codes. Architects, engineers, contractors and others in the building community can take advantage of the latest technological advances accommodated in these codes with resultant savings to the consumer.

For codes to be effective, an understanding and cooperative relationship must exist between building officials and the groups whom they serve--homeowners, developers, urban planners and designers, as well as other echelons of the construction industry. Code must therefore be responsive to government's need to protect the public. They must provide due process for all affected and they must keep pace with a rapidly changing technology which gives birth to innovative ideas. The inability of communities individually to provide such a code process is understandable, but collectively these communities can work together to develop and maintain codes. This approach has given birth to the model code system.

During the early 1900s, model building codes were authored by the code enforcement officials of various communities with key assistance from all segments of the

building industry. Model codes have now become the central regulatory basis for the administration of building regulatory programs in cities, counties and states through the United States. They simply represent a collective undertaking which shares the cost of code development and maintenance while ensuring uniformity of regulations so that the advantage of technology can be optimized.

Building safety code enforcement has historically been accomplished through a system of fees relating to a specific project--a system which is self-supporting. These fees are generally less than one percent of the overall cost of the building project. Public protection is thus obtained in a cost-effective manner with the entire process, from plan review to field inspection, carried out in a professional manner. The system is so well developed that the true complexity of the process is obscure to many. It is for the purpose of creating awareness of this important public service that this pamphlet is provided.

For further information, contact your building department.

Q WHO NEEDS BUILDING CODES?

A We all do-- whether in our homes, offices, schools, stores, factories or places of entertainment. We rely on the safety of structures that surround us in our everyday living. The public need for protection from disaster due to fire, structural collapse and general deterioration underscores the need for modern codes and their administration.

Q BUT HOW RELIABLE ARE THEY?

A Most aspects of building construction--electrical wiring, heating sanitary facilities-- represents a potential hazard to building occupants and users. Building codes provide safeguards. Although no code can eliminate all risks, reducing risks to an acceptable level helps.

Q WHAT IS A BUILDING CODE?

A Practically, it is the government's official statement on building safety. Technically, it is a compendium of laws and ordinances setting minimum safety standards and arranged in a systematic manner (codified) for easy reference. It embraces all aspects of the building construction-- fire and structural items as well as the plumbing, electrical and mechanical systems.

Q WHY INSPECT A BUILDING DURING CONSTRUCTION?

A It is the only way to independently verify that code compliance has been achieved. Did you know that before you moved into your home, office or factory, an average of ten inspections had been made to verify conformity to minimum standards affecting electrical safety and sanitation as well as structural, fire and life safety?

Q HOW ARE SAFE BUILDINGS ACHIEVED?

A Through proper design and construction practice and a code administration program which verifies compliance. You, as a homeowner or business owner, have a substantial investment which can be seriously jeopardized through less than complete code enforcement or compliance.

BUILDING CODES

HOW DO THEY HELP YOU?

Q WHAT IF I WANT TO DO A BUILDING PROJECT MYSELF?

A Building departments have pamphlets and brochures explaining in detail how to obtain permits and design and construct a safe building. Inquire in your local community.

Q WHY SHOULD MINIMUM SAFETY CODES APPLY TO MY OWN HOUSE?

A For several reasons:

- For your personal safety and that of your family and the guests invited into your home.
- To ensure the economic well-being of the community by reducing potential spread of fire and disease.
- For the conservation of energy.
- To protect future home purchasers who deserve a reasonable assurance the home they buy will be safe. (Did you know that a home is resold every five to seven years?)

Q WHAT'S NEW?

A The most recent assignment to building officials comes from the need to conserve energy use in buildings. Elected officials have established definite goals in the area of energy conservation which can best be administered through the routine building regulatory system. Beyond the mere addition of insulation, energy saving steps include new standards for appliance construction, new design concepts to conserve heat from lighting fixtures and a myriad of other approaches to minimize energy demands. Other innovations include such items as showerhead restrictors, set-back

thermostats and low-flush toilets. Steps have also been taken to facilitate solar heating applications and the use of other alternative energy resources. Local building departments provide a wide range of services beyond the usual plans review and building inspection process. These range from the administration of planning or zoning laws to abatement and a number of other related or ancillary duties. Visit your local building department and get acquainted with the people who make it work.

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