

Everything Old Is New Again

It often has been stated that the only true consistency is inconsistency. We also could recall the statement that “In life there is nothing permanent except change.” Our industry is a very good example of just how frequently we are called upon to consider the task of reinventing the wheel.

But reinventing the wheel might be an unfair statement, since many of the changes requested are due to environmental concerns, changes in technology, or the need for stricter enforcement. In the matter of product performance, the proposed changes are usually the result of requests for legislation on a local, state, or federal basis—frequently actions being taken by advocacy groups representing the physically or mentally disadvantaged or environmental concerns.

Experience has been a strict teacher, and our industry segments have used their experiences to react professionally and confidently as inevitable changes occur. Our first experience was the reaction to the demand for stricter water conservation measures caused mainly by the result of a severe drought in the state of California in the late 1970s. The California Energy Commission took some strong early steps in including an energy conservation requirement as well—a valid theory based on the fact that if less water is used, less energy is required to transport, treat, heat, and dispose of it.

This was the first time the industry joined to create a consensus position regarding minimal flow and flush rates that would be required to ensure the integrity of the plumbing system. This thoroughness not only provided realistic flow rates, but also gave industry advocates the facts to react to the initial unrealistic federal control proposed by legislation in the committee planning stages.

The Plumbing Manufacturers Institute (PMI) took the leadership role in dealing with the legislators and was able to provide the material for the federal Water Policy of 1978, which issued directives for the implementation of the regulations. This policy and subsequent local and state directives sufficed until the mid-1980s, when the federal government took a major step in the proposed mandate of the 1.6-gallons-per-flush flow rate. This was a hotly debated topic for years within the industry, but with the strong leadership of industry experts such as Bruce Martin and PMI, a realistic consensus standard was established, which, along with reduced-flow showerheads and faucets, became part of the Energy Policy Act of 1992.

The only wrinkle that occurred in subsequent years was an effort by Congressman Joe Knollenberg of Michigan to repeal the Energy Policy Act of 1992. His legislation would have required manufacturers to produce products with various volumes and flow rates—allowing states to make random changes. The result would be a fragmented system—a flow rate Tower of Babel.

LUCKILY THE LEGISLATION DID NOT GO FORWARD!

We continue to grow in our approach to establishing oversight to improve the spirit as well as the letter of the law. Recently we have witnessed the emergence of the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) and its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building rating system. The LEED system currently

encompasses new construction and major renovations, existing buildings, commercial interiors, homes, health care facilities, and laboratories. More categories are sure to emerge in the future.

Architectural firms as well as consulting engineers quickly included LEED-certified designers to their staffs. Some of the more environmentally friendly systems they embrace are gray water recycling and waterless urinals. They have established themselves as a force for the future, which can give us a feeling of confidence for that time when a movement to review the current standards appears.

And that time is now. Once again the state of California is calling for further flow and flush rate reductions. But now we bring a solid cadre of experience to work with legislators. A group of industry professionals from PMI, the American Society of Sanitary Engineering, ASPE, and USGBC is in place to provide a strong oversight resource to work with the authorities. The integrity of the plumbing system is indeed in good hands!

Water conservation is not the only movement to witness ongoing updates and modifications. We have seen a continuing review of hot water supply temperatures for all types of building occupancy. Usually considered for showering and bathing, hot water supply is now monitored for safe lavatory usage as well. Commercial buildings are supplying tempered water to almost every public rest room. The personal hygiene benefits of frequent hand washing are being strongly emphasized, and comfortable water temperatures will be an inducement toward this goal.

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) also was subjected to review in July 2004, when the U.S. Access Board published the ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities. This update made the acts more consistent with model codes. A historic level of harmonization was reached involving both the guidelines and industry standards. The clarity of these guidelines will discourage those self-styled experts whose interpretations of the law were not only self-serving, but also frequently inaccurate.

There are more issues that foster ongoing review, such as Legionella, public rest room parity, and another effort to reduce lead levels in faucets and other fixtures. Within our industry we have an experienced group of professionals to deal with each issue, those who are generous with their talents and their desires for continuous integrity in the design, installation, and maintenance of plumbing systems. Be of good cheer. We are well represented!

In the words of my sainted Uncle Herschel, “If we don’t change direction soon, we’ll end up where we’re going.” **PSD**



PETER WARSHAW retired from Delta Faucet Co. as vice president of commercial sales. Currently he is associated with Delta as an industry consultant. He is a past president of the Plumbing Manufacturers Institute and served three terms as affiliate liaison to the ASPE Board of Directors. To comment on this article or for more information, e-mail articles@psdmagazine.org.