

# The Evolution of Codes—The Future is Up to Us

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A periodic column in the Mechanical Contractors Association of America, Inc.'s (MCAA) *Reporter* newsletter discusses codes and business, and how code issues affect construction firms. The September/October 2003 column struck a chord for me, with its reminder that the future of the codes is up to those of us in the industry. The article is updated and reprinted here for your consideration.

## The Codes Affect (or Effect) on You

*Contributed by Allen Inlow, senior director of codes and standards, IAPMO (alleninlow1@hotmail.com).*

Who do the codes really affect? Or, should that be what effect do the codes really have? Ms. Salter, my high school English teacher, would be pleased that at least I recognize there is a difference between the two words.

Actually in this instance I believe that both words fit. The adoption and enforcement of construction codes and standards, or lack of code adoption and enforcement for that matter, affects literally everyone who lives in, or even travels through, that geographic region or jurisdiction. The application of the codes and their effect upon the health, safety, and quality of life on all people can be dramatic. Everyone has a vested interest.

It is no surprise to anyone who is paying the slightest bit of attention to codes in the United States, certainly including the members of MCAA, which codes and the organizations responsible for creating them are going through a major evolutionary period. This evolution began nearly 10 years ago, when the three existing trade associations of the building officials (BOCA, SBCCI, and ICBO) determined they would abandon all of their existing codes and begin a consolidated effort to publish a new set of codes for every facet of the construction industry and code enforcement community.

IAPMO (International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials), NFPA (National Fire Protection Association), WFCA/UFCA (Western Fire Chiefs Association/Uniform Fire Code Association), and ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-Con-

ditioning Engineers) responded by consolidating and coordinating codes and establishing the C3 Comprehensive Consensus Code set based upon ANSI principles and procedures.

Most of you already knew that, so how's it going? What's happening in codes? The evolution continues:

- February 3, 2003, BOCA, SBCCI, and ICBO all dissolved their organizations and merged into the ICC at the annual meeting of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB).
- IAPMO published the 2003 Uniform Plumbing Code and Uniform Mechanical Code, the first Mechanical Code and second Plumbing Code (the first was ANSI A-40, which MCAA cosponsored) ever to be developed under ANSI.
- ASHRAE and NFPA incorporated the ANSI 90.1 and 90.2 standards into NFPA 900-Building Energy Code.
- ICC and NAHB have revised their code development procedures on their International Residential Code to harmonize the requirements from their base plumbing, mechanical, and electrical codes.
- NFPA 1 – Fire Prevention Code and the Uniform Fire Code were integrated into NFPA 1 – Uniform Fire Code by the Western Fire Chiefs Association/Uniform Fire Code Association and NFPA.
- Both the ANSI accredited C3 and ICC building official organizations have released their 2003 code sets.
- The building officials considered dropping the ICC Electrical Code from the ICC code set, including all ICC EC administrative provisions. In their September 2003 annual meeting the ICC building officials voted on a proposal from the entire electrical industry that would have eliminated all of the ICC Electrical Code and all references to it in all ICC codes, naming NFPA 70 – National Electrical Code as the only standard. It was defeated by a majority vote of the building officials in the ICC Annual Meeting.

- The issuance of NFPA 5000 – Building Construction and Safety Code this past October has resulted in votes for its adoption by the State of California as the State Building Code, and by the City of Phoenix, AZ. The ICC is working to repeal both decisions. The City of Pasadena, TX, adopted the full C3 set of codes. ICC has continued with their adoption process as well, with adoptions in Louisiana and Washington.
- Code adoption considerations and hearings are now going on “full speed ahead” in jurisdictions all across the country. The areas that adopted a “wait and see” stance are now beginning their considerations. Most of these are on 1997 or earlier codes and feel they need to adopt new codes to stay current. Nearly everyone agrees with that.

So, that takes us back to the beginning. Who do the codes really affect? They will *really* affect you, your business, your customers and the quality of life for everyone you know.

What will the code effect be? That is largely up to you and a relatively small group of other people. The ICC building officials have a group of supporters who will show up at code meetings. The C3 Comprehensive Consensus Code organizations have a contingent of support who will be there as well. The difference could easily be you. Determine which codes best serve you, your interests, and your community, then work to have those codes adopted.

A little effort now can have a very positive affect and produce a beneficial effect well into the future. ■



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