

# Does It Really Mean What It Says?

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Many of us have the opportunity to design projects all across this great country of ours. But with this opportunity comes the problem of making sure the design complies with local codes and ordinances. That is not always an easy task. It can be quite frustrating, depending on the authority having jurisdiction and how familiar you are with local interpretations of code.

I encountered one such situation not long ago. The code required that floor drains be located in toilet rooms for public use. It is very common for floor drains to be located in public toilet rooms, so there may not appear to be any lesson here.

Remember, however, that code language can be read in many ways. What is stated in one code may be the same as what is stated in most other codes, with one crucial difference—the definitions.

Depending on where you are, codes differ regarding floor drains in toilet rooms. The code requirement for floor drains in toilet rooms is not the issue that needs to be dealt with. Interpretation of the code requirement is the issue. For instance, the Illinois Plumbing Code states, “At least one (1) floor drain shall be located in every restroom having a masonry or concrete floor except those for private use.” Seems very straightforward, except it can be quite confusing if you are not aware of the definition of *private use*.

**You need to understand what the authority having jurisdiction is looking for in your design.**

In many areas, *public toilet rooms* are defined as the building’s main toilet rooms to serve the general public. Staff toilet rooms or other toilet rooms not accessible to the general public often are considered private. One example is a toilet room that serves only staff in a hospital. Another example is a coaches’ locker room. These toilet rooms are not available for use by the general public, and in theory they may not require a floor drain. However, if you define *private use* as applying to places where the fixtures are intended for the use of a single family or individual (e.g., a residence, a hotel), you are changing the places where a floor drain may be required.

When reading a plumbing code, you have to go back to the definitions to determine the intent of the writers of the code. Just taking a statement in the code and applying it universally, without checking on what the words in the code language really are intended to mean, can have devastating results. Not having provided floor drains during the design phase of a project can easily be remedied while the underground plumbing is being installed. Waiting until the punchlist or the plumbing inspector’s final walkthrough to find out whether floor drains are required has an entirely different effect.

You need to take the time to verify what each code says in the local area

you are working in, and you need to understand what the authority having jurisdiction is looking for in your design. One good way to accomplish these things is to talk to the code official yourself, having a friendly discussion on the official’s particular code interpretation. Another way is to call an ASPE member who practices in the area of your project. I have done this many times and have found the experience to be very beneficial. It’s also a good way to renew friendships or make new friends with peers across the country. Frequently the person you are calling knows about other items you should be watching for and how the authority having jurisdiction is likely to interpret other provisions of the code.

The lesson is to better understand the interpretation of the plumbing code you are designing to. Not understanding can be very expensive. None of us enjoys having that discussion. Use the information you have available, and don’t be afraid to ask questions. A half-hour conversation now may save more than you think later. ■



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where we would be if others who practiced before us were as narrow minded as some who practice today. If this were the case, we would be using outhouses rather than indoor plumbing.

I am grateful for those who have had

the ability to understand and accept change and be unafraid to implement change. We live in an everchanging world, and our technology must change so we can deliver to our clients better and more cost-effective systems.

This is our obligation as designers and engineers in the plumbing industry. The acceptance of change should not be curtailed or obscured. ■

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