

Who's the Responsible Party—The Contractor or the Engineer?

I have been designing, specifying, and providing construction management on plumbing projects in Pittsburgh and the surrounding area for roughly 20 years. I have the following question for our industry designers: Who is responsible for the design of plumbing systems? The simple answer appears to be the designer. But I have found in speaking to large numbers of plumbing contractors that they say “Not so fast!”

The phrase *To code*, found in all specifications, in numerous cases appears to put the burden of design onto the plumbing contractor. I have seen examples of contract drawings that are bid documents but are incomplete and show minimal sizing of any kind on any piping utility that is part of the plumbing contract. There is a big note on the top of the drawing that says, in short, to verify everything and install to code.

When I ask contractors how they bid this type of work in the 5-week

bidding period, the answer is, “We design it to code, then we price it that way.” The contractors note that the phrase *Design to code* puts the legal burden of the design on the contractor. In some cases contractors fight for change orders because the connections and line sizes are not shown on the document, so the contractor feels he doesn't own it. Does the contractor own it because it states *Install to code*?

My answer is that the designer at the engineering firm is responsible for showing all items designed to the plumbing code on the contract set of drawings. The plumbing contractor is responsible for installing the system to code. If the designer doesn't show or indicate in the specifications that the items are to be installed, the contractor doesn't own it. The engineering firm is being paid a large sum of money to design plumbing systems, and the contractor is bidding on the installation.

It appears that to save time on engineering projects, designers are hanging their hats on the phrase *To code*. It is my opinion that we designers should be trying to create as close to an “as-built” as possible. Even though the drawings are diagrammatic, it is our responsibility to give the contractor and the owner drawings that clearly show a plumbing system that can be designed to the code and priced fairly, without any guessing.

It is important that we as members of ASPE take responsibility for what we show and size on our documents. Don't rely on a salesman to size your water heater or a plumbing contractor to design your plumbing systems. Be responsible for your actions Don't hide behind *To Code*.

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Author's note: This opinion was written to praise engineering firms that produce a good set of drawings contractors and owners can appreciate. ■

What Is It?

Recognize this early device?

In the May/June issue of *Plumbing Systems & Design*, “The American Sanitary Plumbing Museum” featured a challenge to readers in the form of a photograph of a tray or cup placed above the hot and cold faucets in an old fashioned copper bathtub. What is it?

The number-one guess was a cup to hold the bath stopper. The number-two guess was a tray to hold soap. Very good guesses, but not quite right. According to the museum, this tray was originally designed as a jewelry or ring holder.

Thanks to Shane P. Peters, City of Santa Monica Water Division, Santa Monica, CA, for an entirely different perspective on what the device might have been. After his first guess—a soap dish—he suggested it was perhaps a



bidet sitting on the tub valve! Mr. Peters also submitted the first response to be received by *PSD*. Congratulations! ASPE is sending him one of the new ASPE luggage identification straps and an ASPE logo pen.