

Know Your Code

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If you were to ask two people which plumbing code is best, you might get three different answers. There is no perfect plumbing code. Each code is continually being revised and improved.

During the past year, this column has tried to show similarities and differences in the two major model plumbing codes—the International Plumbing Code (IPC) and the Uniform Plumbing Code (UPC). Both the IPC and UPC have strengths and weaknesses. The purpose of this column is to help plumbing designers and others interested in the codes to become more familiar with them.

Over time, many jurisdictions change the plumbing code they use. Some change from their own written code to a national model plumbing code, while others change from a national model plumbing code to their own code. And some change from one major model plumbing code to the other major model plumbing code.

I have talked with building officials and plumbing inspectors from different jurisdictions. Some were thinking about changing to a different plumbing code. One jurisdiction believed its state-written code to be far superior to the major model plumbing codes. Another jurisdiction had become disillusioned with the model plumbing code it was using and changed to another model plumbing code.

Recently, I was asked to go to the job site of a project I had designed. The plumbing inspector had determined there were major code violations and had rejected the installation. I was

asked to help the plumbing inspector work with the plumbing contractor to determine how the drain waste-and-vent installation could be made to meet IPC requirements. The plumbing contractor expressed his frustration about a change from one model plumbing code to another. He had been a plumber for more than 20 years. He had become a journeyman plumber using the UPC. Now he felt that the IPC was confusing. But he had forgotten that early in his career our state changed from a state-written code

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to the UPC. He had forgotten that the state-written code had many of the venting systems used in the “new” IPC.

Many of the problems with the installation were violations of the UPC as well as the IPC. The major problem was the installation of many S-traps. As we discussed the solutions with the plumber, he started to

relax. He realized that as designer, installer, and inspector we needed to work together to make the installation the best it could be.

Do we as plumbing designers know what proper plumbing installation is? If we need to remodel an existing drain waste-and-vent installation, will we recognize it as some type of special venting, such as circuit venting or a combination drain-and-vent system, or will it look like some mishmash of piping? As plumbing designers, we need to know what constitutes a proper installation, and we need to know all types of installations. Can you answer the following questions?

- Does the plumbing code I use allow me all the options I would like?
- Does the plumbing code I use allow the use of a Sovent system or Philadelphia stack system?
- Am I familiar with the requirements of the drain waste-and-vent system?

Most of us are familiar with one of the major model plumbing codes—the code used in the jurisdictions in which we do most of our work. And probably most of us have read the *ASPE Data Books*. There are differences between the two model plumbing codes. In fact, there are differences between the *ASPE Data Books* and the two model plumbing codes. Each of us needs to know the differences.

This column is here to help all plumbing designers. If you have a code question or want to increase your understanding of an engineering principle listed in the plumbing code you use, please send me your question. Jay Mundy of the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials and Carl Marbery of the International Code Council have agreed to help answer questions from their codes' point of view. ■



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