

BUILDING CODES: HOW DO THEY HELP?

The regulation of building construction is not a recent phenomenon. It can be traced through records from over 4,000 years. Through time, people have become increasingly aware of their ability to avoid the negative consequences of building construction failures.

In early American, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson encouraged the development of building regulations to provide minimum standards that would ensure health and safety. Today, most of the United States is covered by a network of modern building regulations ranging in coverage from fire and structural safety to health, security and conservation of energy.

Public safety is not the only by-product offered by modern codes. Architects, engineers, contractors and others in the building community can take advantage of the latest technological advances allowed in these codes, which result in savings to the consumer.

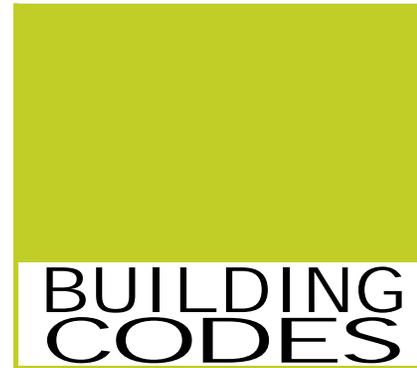
For codes to be effective, an understanding and cooperative relationship must exist between building officials and the groups whom they serve — homeowners, developers, urban planners and designers as well as other sectors of the construction industry. Codes must therefore be responsive to the government's need to protect the public. They must provide due process for all affected and they must keep pace with rapidly changing technologies which pave the way for new ideas.

No single community can create a comprehensive building code. But by working together, a number of communities can develop and maintain codes. This approach led to the model code system.

During the early 1900s, code enforcement officials from various communities wrote model building codes which incorporated ideas from people throughout the building industry. Model codes are now the basis for administering building regulatory programs throughout the United States. They represent a collective venture which spreads out the cost of code development and maintenance among many municipalities, while creating uniform regulations.

Building safety code enforcement traditionally been accomplished through a fee system relating to a specific project. The fees cover the costs of enforcing the building codes. These fees are generally less than 1 percent of the overall cost of the building project. From plan review to inspection, the public is protected in a cost effective and professional manner.

**IF YOU HAVE ANY OTHER QUESTIONS CALL
THE OFFICE OF BUILDING SERVICES
AT 586.446.2360**



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BUILDING CODES

BUILDING CODES QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q: WHO NEEDS BUILDING CODES?

A: We all do — whether in our homes, offices, schools, stores, factories or places of entertainment. We rely on the safety of structures that surround us in our everyday living. The public needs to be protected from disaster due to fire, structural collapse and general deterioration. The creation and administration of modern codes helps to prevent such disasters.

Q: BUT HOW RELIABLE ARE THEY?

A: Essential aspects of building construction — electrical wiring, heating, sanitary facilities — represent a potential hazard to building occupants and users. Building codes provide safeguards. Although no code can eliminate all risks, building codes reduce potential risk factors.

Q: WHAT IS A BUILDING CODE?

A: Practically, it is the government's official statement on building safety. Technically, it is a collection of laws and ordinances setting minimum safety standards and arranged in a system (known as codification) for easy reference. It embraces all aspects of building construction — fire and structural items as well as the plumbing, electrical and mechanical systems.

Q: WHO USES BUILDING CODES?

A: Everyone is impacted in a building construction project — architects and engineers, contractors and subcontractors, the manufacturers and distributors of building materials and, finally, the user or occupant of the building.

Q: WHY INSPECT A BUILDING DURING CONSTRUCTION?

A: It is the only way to verify independently that the building will meet all of the community's codes. Before a home, office or factory can be used, an average of 20 inspections are made to verify conformity to electrical, safety, sanitation, and structural standards.

Q: HOW ARE SAFE BUILDINGS ACHIEVED?

A: Safety is achieved through proper design and construction practice and a code administration program which verifies compliance. As a homeowner or business owner, you have a substantial investment which can be seriously jeopardized through less-than-complete code enforcement or compliance.

Q: WHAT IF I WANT TO DO A BUILDING PROJECT MYSELF?

A: The Office of Building Services has pamphlets and brochures explaining in detail how to obtain permits and design and construct a safe building.

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Q: WHY SHOULD MINIMUM SAFETY CODES APPLY TO MY OWN HOUSE?

A: For several reasons:

- For the safety of your family and your guests.
- To ensure the economic well-being of the community by reducing potential spread of fire and disease.
- For energy conservation.
- To protect future home purchasers who deserve reasonable assurance that the home they buy will be safe. On average, a home is resold every five to seven years.

Q: WHAT'S NEW?

A: The most recent assignment to building officials comes from the need to decrease energy use in buildings. Elected officials have established firm goals in the area of energy conservation which can be best administered through the routine building regulatory system.

Beyond the mere addition of insulation, energy-saving steps include new standards for appliance construction, new design concepts to conserve heat from lighting fixtures and a number of other approaches to minimize energy demands. Other innovations include showerhead restrictors, setback thermostats, and low-flush toilets.

Steps have also been taken to facilitate solar-heating applications and the use of other alternative energy resources.

The City of Sterling Heights provides a wide range of services beyond the usual plan review and building inspection process. These range from the administration of planning or zoning laws to housing maintenance inspection, nuisance abatement and a number of other related duties.

Contact the City of Sterling Heights Office of Building Services and get acquainted with the people who make it work.

