

nj municipalities

Official Publication of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities

May 2018

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Building Safety Month

Recognizing the value of Code Officials

By Stephen D. Jones, CBO, MS, NJCEM, former president of the Morris County Building Officials Association, the New Jersey Building Officials Association, and the International Code Council

Often times, if you mention to friends that you have to go get a construction permit at the local building department, the reaction you may receive may be roughly the same as that of going to the dentist and being told you need a root canal. The reality is quite different—getting a root canal is often less painful! While I say this with my tongue firmly planted in my cheek, the sad reality is that there are endless anecdotal stories of building permit horrors. Typically that is the furthest thing from the truth. Building departments and code officials here in New Jersey are some of the most well-trained, state-licensed municipal professionals in the Country.



According to NJBOA president, Pat Naticchione of Egg Harbor Township, “Being a code official is one of the most misunderstood and maligned aspects of municipal government. However, it is also one of the most rewarding professions ever. As a code professional, our job is to ensure the safety our residents through the proper application of construction codes and regulations adopted throughout the state.”

Fortunately, New Jersey is among a handful of states that have adopted a statewide code, along with a robust and nationally recognized inspection and enforcement process. Basically, the same code that is in effect in High Point is also

used in Cape May and every one of the 565 communities throughout the great Garden State.

New Jersey prides itself in having one of the best run code administrations, nationwide. With that, the Building Officials Association of New Jersey (BOANJ) and its successor organization, the New Jersey Building Officials’ Association (NJBOA), have been a proud affiliate of the League of Municipalities for many years. The Officers, Directors, and members of NJBOA work diligently with the League to help promote responsible development while working within the parameters of safe, secure, and resilient codes.

Working together

Effective code development and enforcement does not happen in a vacuum. Many members of our association participate in the open governmental consensus process of code development promulgated by the International Code Council (ICC). The International Code Council is a member-focused association, dedicated to developing model codes and standards used in the design, build and compliance process, to construct safe, sustainable, affordable and resilient structures. The International Codes®, or I-Codes®, published by ICC, provide minimum safeguards for people at home, at school, and in the workplace.

“ Participation on the national level helps to ensure New Jersey’s voices are heard and that our concerns are included in the governmental consensus process of code development.

The codes are a living document, and they are updated every three years to reflect changes in technology and in response to issues and concerns raised by members of the public, industry, and code officials, alike. NJBOA, along with industry professionals and members of the public, take an active and, often, leadership role in helping to develop codes that are adopted across the entire county and, in some cases, internationally.

New Jersey adopts a number of the regulations contained within the comprehensive and integrated family of codes developed by the ICC. As such, the codes work seamlessly across the broad spectrum of construction-related

issues. However, code development is only part of the process. Codes don’t work without effective enforcement and public awareness. While the process may seem daunting at times, it is only through robust enforcement that New Jersey continually maintains such a high national ranking from the Jersey City-based Insurance Services Organization.

Additionally, public awareness plays a huge role in successful enforcement. One of the ways of getting the public, as well as mayors, council members, and administrations, to understand and appreciate what municipal code officials are responsible for is through a successful public awareness process.

Building Safety Month

May is Building Safety Month! For the last 38 years, NJBOA, its affiliate organizations, along with the International Code Council, and its annual supporters, have celebrated it by helping families, businesses and members of the public at large understand what it takes to create

safe and sustainable structures. The campaign continues to grow every year, and it reinforces and underscores the need to adopt current, updated, and responsible construction codes.

As we have seen from the effects of several natural disasters over the last few years, those homes and businesses constructed from the most current versions of the codes typically sustained less damage and were able to recover quicker than those that were constructed under earlier (often less robust) versions of the codes.

In an article that recently appeared in CITYLAB, 2017 was cited as being the worst year for losses associated with natural disasters. In financial terms, losses across the country totaled an estimated \$306 billion. In 2005, the National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS) presented a report that found “for every dollar spent in mitigation and preparation (it) saves approximately four dollars spent in recovery costs.”



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Building Safety Month

Recent reports indicated that this number may be significantly under-estimated, as ranges could be as high as six to eight dollars for every dollar spent. Think about that fact...a dollar spent now on resilient construction could save up to eight dollars in rebuilding costs later. Analyses like these help to bolster the argument to adopt the most recently produced versions of the codes.

According to ICC Senior Vice President of Government Relations, Sara Yerkes, "The Building Safety Month campaign is supported by the members of NJBOA, along with the over 64,000 members of the International Code Council and numerous other diverse partner members from all aspects of the construction, design, and safety communities."

While building safety takes a year-round effort, each week of May will focus on a different aspect, such as: partnering with local code officials to help build stronger, more resilient communities through better use of science and technology; protecting communities from disaster; safeguarding water supplies and improving education and training standards for a safer and more secure tomorrow.

Every year, during the first week in

What can you do to help?

There are a number of ways in which your community can get involved.

- Have your local council pass resolutions of support recognizing the National Building Safety Month activities.
- Encourage your local code professionals to participate in code-related activities.
 - Public outreach programs
 - Speaking with civic groups and schools
- Host an informational meeting to discuss various aspects of public safety related to construction activity.

By doing these and other activities, you will be joining the literally thousands of stakeholders across the country who recognize that "Building Safety is No Accident!"

@ Promotional material and sample proclamations can be found on the ICC website at iccsafe.org.

May, Building Safety Month kicks off in New Jersey with an educational and training conference held in Atlantic City. Code officials across the state will participate in various training seminars designed to help strengthen their skills and to expose them to new and emerging trends within the construction and design communities. As a code professional, this is the best learning experience

offered within the state. Code official across the state must remain proficient and knowledgeable in the codes, and periodic training is a requirement to maintain their licenses.

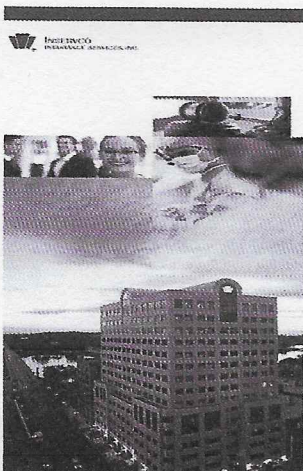
On the national level, your code officials should be participating in the code development process offered by the ICC. Participation on the national level helps to ensure New Jersey's voices are heard and that our concerns are included in the governmental consensus process of code development.

Remember, code enforcement in general does not make headlines. However, it is through the diligent services provided by your local, dedicated code official that there are very few losses in New Jersey relative to construction-related issues. Remember. Building Codes Save Lives! 🚧

@ Stephen D. Jones, CBO, MS, NJCEM, is the former president of the Morris County Building Officials Association, the New Jersey Building Officials Association, and the International Code Council. He recently retired after almost 26 years as a working code official. He still maintains an active role in code development and enforcement, and is a strong advocate for public safety. He can be reached at sdjones7050@gmail.com.

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