# Building Codes— How They Help You

*The regulation of building construction is not a recent phenomenon. It can be traced through recorded history for more than 4,000 years. Through time, people have become increasingly aware of ways to avoid the catastrophic consequences of building-construction failures.*

# History of Building Codes

In early America, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson encouraged the development of building regulations to provide for 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 byproduct afforded by modern codes. Architects, engineers, contractors, and others in the building community can take advantage of the latest technological advances accommodated by these codes with viable savings to the consumer.

For codes to be effective, an understanding and cooperative relationship must exist between building officials and the groups they serve—homeowners, developers, urban planners and designers, and others in 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 keep pace with rapidly-changing technology. All of these groups work together to develop and maintain codes.

During the early 1900s, model building codes were authored by the code enforcement officials of various communities with key assistance from all segments of the building industry. Now, model codes are the central regulatory basis for the administration of programs in cities, counties, and states throughout the United States. They simply represent a collective undertaking, which shares the cost of code development and maintenance while ensuring uniformity of regulations so that the advantages of technology can be optimized.

Building safety code enforcement has historically been accomplished by defraying the costs of administration through a system of fees relating to a specific project—a system that is self-supporting. These fees are generally less than one percent of the overall cost of the building project. Public protection is thus obtained in a cost-effective manner with the entire process, from plan review to field inspection, carried out in a professional manner. The system is so well developed that the true complexity of the process is obscure to many. It is for the purpose of creating awareness of this important public service that this pamphlet is provided.

For further information, contact your local building department.

# Who Needs Building Codes?

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 need for protection from disaster due to fire, structural collapse, and general deterioration underscores the need for modern codes and their administration.

### HOW RELIABLE ARE THEY?

Most 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, reducing risks to an acceptable level helps.

### WHAT IS A BUILDING CODE?

Practically, it is the government's official statement on building safety. Technically, it is a compendium of minimum safety standards arranged in a systematic manner (codified) for easy reference. It embraces all aspects of building construction—fire, structural, plumbing, electrical, and mechanical.

### WHAT IF I WANT TO DO A BUILDING PROJECT MYSELF?

Building departments have pamphlets and brochures explaining, in detail, how to obtain permits and design and construct a safe building. Inquire within your local community.

### WHY SHOULD CODES APPLY TO MY OWN HOUSE?

For several reasons:

- For your personal safety, and that of your family, and the guests invited into your home.
- To ensure the economic well-being of the community by reducing potential spread of fire and disease.
- For the conservation of energy.
- To protect future home purchasers who deserve reasonable assurance that the home they buy will be safe.

## Support Building Safety!

For more information about building safety codes and local requirements, contact your local building department below:

**CITY OF CHAMPAIGN**
**BUILDING SAFETY DIVISION**
**307 SOUTH RANDOLPH**
**CHAMPAIGN, IL 61820**

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