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.

Local building departments provide 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 natural or ancillary duties. Visit your local building department and get acquainted with the people who make it work.

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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 endeavor, 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 delaying 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 final inspection, handled out of a professional contractor. The system is so well developed that the true complexity of the process is obscured 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.