

Make a Difference: Be Part of the Team

By Brooks Baker



We are all shaped by events in our past that have been meaningful to us. While I was working as a young plant engineer in a small Alabama manufacturing company, a new law was passed called the Occupational Safety and Health Act, or OSHA. As the new kid on the block and “college boy,” responsibility for plant safety and OSHA compliance became one of my roles. I remember reading the *Federal Register* to find out what was required and how to get into compliance with this new law—a seemingly impossible task.

That job was where the issue of the desirability of positive results (i.e., safety) versus the cost of safety features required for construction and operations began to register with me. Then, that issue became personal when we had a fire, which was quickly extinguished by a brand-new fire suppression system that possibly saved one life—mine.

While working at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Hospital, we had a fire in a patient-care area that resulted in no injuries or loss of life because of all those Joint Commission, National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), and International Code Committee (ICC) requirements that we so often com-

plained about. As these examples remind us, standards and codes do provide a valuable resource and save lives.

Unfortunately, we cannot make every negative situation end with a positive outcome, but properly thought-out and implemented standards and codes can be of significant help. Standards and codes that are not well planned can cost more than their value justifies and in some rare cases actually decrease the effectiveness of our safety systems. That is why APPA members need to lend their experience, knowledge, and wisdom to the standards and codes development process.

The APPA Standards and Codes Council (ASCC) began in 2004 as the Code Advocacy Committee and then became the Code Advocacy Task Force. The mission of the ASCC is to:

- Provide education and information to membership regarding standards and codes and their impact on facility managers and institutions
- Evaluate the impact on higher education of existing or proposed codes
- Positively influence the standards and codes development process

The ASCC and its Work Groups have been very active and are accomplishing a significant amount of valuable work for APPA membership. See the 2018-2019 APPA Standards & Codes Annual Report for some impressive information (https://www.appa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2018_2019-ASCC-Annual-Report-R1.pdf). At the same time you can

check out the new APPA website, where the Standards & Codes page can also be reached by clicking on the “Services” tab and scrolling through the dropdown menu.

But don’t just click on the Standards & Codes link and then forget all about it. I would encourage you to go a step further and ask yourself, “Now, what can I do to be part of the fun?”

Here are just a few possibilities:

1. Volunteer for Work Groups and then participate. Think about what you are interested in (e.g., NFPA, ICC, etc.) and get involved.
2. Be engaged from your office by subscribing to publications, joining chats, and more.
3. Attend the APPA webinars on Standards and Codes issues.
4. Be aware of illogical or impractical requirements and contact ASCC through Billie Zidek at APPA (billie@appa.org) to learn about specific ways to impact the issue.
5. Learn more:
 - A. Talk to your AHJ (authority having jurisdiction) to determine which codes and versions are being enforced at your institution.
 - B. Ask your AHJ for advice; they are usually eager to partner with institutions.
 - C. Consider a walk-through with your AHJ if advice is needed.
 - D. Read about code violations if available locally or through your AHJ.
6. Be aggressive about resolving code violations on campus. No reasonable person in a position of authority wants to let a potentially hazardous situation exist that they know about. Paths of egress are the biggest issue here with blocked corridors or exits.
7. Join NFPA, ICC, the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), or other standards- or code-writing bodies, and participate. APPA can help you get on their committees, if you are willing to serve there.

In short, try to be part of the team! 🐷

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