Changes To The New *Code*

by Dean K. Wilson, P.E.

Question: What is the status of the new Code, NFPA 72-1999, *National Fire Alarm Code?* And, what changes does the new *Code* contain?

Answer: The presses roll on a full tilt. The new *National Fire Alarm Code,* NFPA 72-1999 will soon find its way into the hands of manufacturers, specifications writers, designers, installers, maintainers, users, and authorities having jurisdiction.

On July 22, 1999, the Standards Council of the National Fire Protection Association issued this document as amended by action taken on May 20th during the NFPA World Fire Safety Congress in Baltimore, MD. During its deliberations, the Council heard and acted on several complaints. The new *Code* has an effective date of August 13, 1999. The American National Standards Institute also approved the new Code on this same August 13th date.

The Technical Correlating Committee on the *National Fire Alarm Code* changed the order of the chapters in this new edition. The Chapter order continues to begin with Chapter 1, "Fundamentals of Fire Alarm Systems." It then moves to a relocated Chapter 2, "Initiating Devices." Next, in the same location as the 1996 edition, a user will find Chapter 3, "Protected Premises Fire Alarm Systems." Then a user will find a relocated Chapter 4, "Notification Appliances for Fire Alarm Systems" and Chapter 5, "Supervising Station Fire Alarm Systems." Next in line, a user will find that a new Technical Committee on Public Fire Alarm Reporting

Systems has created a new Chapter 6, “Public Fire Alarm Reporting Systems.” This new Chapter 6 consists of revised sections 4-6 and 4-7 from NFPA 72-1996 and other material. Next in the new Code, a user will discover that Chapter 7 continues as “Testing and Maintenance of Fire Alarm Systems.” This Chapter completes the portion of the *Code* that deals with commercial and industrial fire alarm systems.

What happened to Household Fire Warning Equipment? Formerly Chapter 2, now Chapter 8 covers the requirements for “Fire Warning Equipment for Dwelling Units.” The NFPA Technical Committee responsible for this Chapter has added performance-based design to supplement the former prescriptive requirements. Even if you do not specifically deal with smoke alarms for one- and two-family dwellings, you should peruse this Chapter to see what performance-based design fire alarm system requirements might look like if this trend continues during the next revision cycle.

Naturally, in Chapter 1 a user will find a number of revised definitions. Many of these editorial edits intend to improve clarity of the particular definition. Throughout the rest of the *Code,* many of the changes appear to have mostly cosmetic value. However, some of the rearrangement gives such a completely different appearance to the affected Chapter, that many users will find themselves searching hard to find familiar requirements.

For example, the NFPA Technical Committee on Protective Premises Fire Alarm Systems has extensively revised Chapter 3. Many former requirements now reside within 3-8, “System Requirements.”

Section 3-8.1 covers requirements for Fire Alarm Control Units. Section 3-8.2 covers requirements for Combination Systems. Section 3-8.3 covers requirements for Fire Alarm System Inputs. Section 3-8.4 covers requirements for Fire Alarm System Outputs. Section 3-8.5 covers

requirements for Guard's Tour Supervisory Service. Section 3-8.9 covers requirements for Fire Safety Control Functions. Section 3-9 covers requirements for Fire Alarm Control Units. And, section 3-10 covers requirements for Low Power Radio (Wireless) Systems.

Broadened requirements of 3-8.13.4 permit non-emergency use of speakers that serve as fire alarm notification appliances. The non-emergency use must not compromise the requirement for monitoring for integrity. And, the authority having jurisdiction must permit such use.

Chapter 4 adds Appendix material to begin to address the subject of intelligibility of audible textual notification appliances (speakers). This subject has become increasingly important in a variety of venues where the nature of the facility makes understanding the voice message difficult. The National Systems Contractors Association (NSCA) has sponsored changes for certain occupancies to require a test for intelligibility in accordance with an international standard used extensively throughout Europe.

Chapter 5 now provides guidance to an authority having jurisdiction in comparing the requirements for central station, proprietary supervising station and remote supervising station systems. This guidance takes the form of a detailed matrix of system requirements in section 5-5.1 and in Appendix Table A-5-5.1. This material will also aid a manufacturer who wishes to develop a new transmission technology.

New Chapter 6 holds particular interest for IMSA members. This Chapter includes requirements for Public Fire Alarm Reporting Systems and Auxiliary Fire Alarm System connections to a public fire alarm reporting system. The NFPA Technical Committee responsible for this Chapter has eliminated the requirements for the parallel telephone type of public fire alarm reporting system. In taking this action, the Technical Committee has stated that this form of system no longer exists.

Chapter 7 contains some updated testing methods. These changes will help clarify the nature and scope of the required testing and maintenance for a fire alarm system.

Everyone who works with fire alarm systems should at least purchase a copy NFPA 72-1999. And, if a user wants additional commentary on the *Code*, a new edition of the NFPA *National Fire Alarm Code Handbook* will be available in March, 2000.

And, to match the revised Code, NFPA's newly created International Professional Development Center (IPDC) has substantially revised their three-day *National Fire Alarm Code* seminar program. To order either or both documents, or to obtain seminar information, please telephone NFPA Order Center at 1-800-344-3555.

In keeping with IMSA's commitment to benefit its members by staying on the cutting edge of developments in fire protection and traffic control technology, IMSA's own Certification Committee will no doubt soon incorporate the changes to NFPA 72-1999 into the highly-respected *IMSA Fire Alarm Certification Program.*

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