

Highlights of the New NFPA 72-2002 - Part 1

by Dean K. Wilson, P.E.

One of the challenges that every user of NFPA documents must face from time to time has presented itself to those who use NFPA 72, *National Fire Alarm Code*. I am talking about the adoption of a revised edition of the *Code*. The NFPA Standards Council has recently released NFPA 72-2002, *National Fire Alarm Code*, with an effective date of August 8, 2002.

While it may take some jurisdictions a while to actually adopt this revised edition, forward thinking users will want to have a relatively in depth look at the changes to the *Code*. Over the course of the next few issues, I will attempt to give you my summary of the most significant changes to the *Code*.

Most of you probably realize that changes to the *Code* occur as a result of Public Proposals submitted to NFPA Standards Administration. These Public Proposals come from a wide variety of users. Even some of the members of the eight Technical Committees that have responsibility for a portion of the document submit Public Proposals.

Each Public Proposal must receive a careful review by the appropriate Technical Committee. During that review, the Committee must take formal action on each proposal. The Committee can also generate a Committee Proposal if they feel they must make changes to some portion of the document.

Once the Committee acts on the Proposals, they must confirm their action by letter ballot. The eight letter ballots then must receive review by the Technical Correlating Committee. The Correlating Committee will attempt to resolve any issues of correlation between the various

Technical Committees. The actions taken by the Correlating Committee will also receive confirmation by letter ballot.

NFPA then publishes the Report on Proposals so that all interested parties may review the action taken by the Committees and Correlating Committee. During the 60 days that follow, anyone may submit a Public Comment relating to any of the Public Proposals.

Once again, the Committees must review and act on the Public Proposals. And, the Correlating Committee must review the actions taken by the Committees. Following these detailed steps in the process, NFPA will publish the Report on Comments.

At the NFPA World Fire Safety Congress in May of 2002, NFPA 72-2002 received review by the NFPA members attending the Technical Report session. Individuals who submitted a Proposal or Comment can make amendments during this session. Those present may also make certain other motions. Then the members present vote on the amended document, and it moves on to the Standards Council.

With this process in mind, if you feel about this like I do, it seems that we just become used to finding material in a "new" edition of the *Code*, when another edition comes along. One bit of good news, the Technical Correlating Committee on Signaling System for the Protection of Life and Property voted during their July meeting to extend the normal revision cycle one year. This means that the next edition of the *Code* will bear a revision date of 2006.

When you buy your copy of the *Code*, you will rejoice when you discover that the vertical rules have returned to the margins. These rules indicate new or revised text. Be on guard, however. Sometimes the vertical rule only indicates that the number designation of the referenced Chapter has changed. This may trick you into thinking that the Committee has made a substantive change to a section that has really not changed at all.

A new marginal marking appears in this edition. A bullet between paragraphs that remain now indicates material deleted from the previous edition of the *Code*.

Now, to the main task at hand, I will try to summarize the major changes to the *Code*. Throughout the discussion that follows I will refer to the actions of “the Committee.” By this reference, I mean the National Fire Protection Association Technical Committee assigned to the specific Chapter under discussion. And, when I indicate that the Committee has done this or that, I mean that by acting on the Public Proposals or Public Comments, or by providing Committee Proposals or Committee Comments, the Committee has revised the text accordingly.

First of all, the document has received a major facelift in order to conform to the NFPA *Manual of Style*. Throughout the text, many previous *Exceptions* have been reworded and converted to specific requirements. Conforming to the NFPA *Manual of Style* also required adding some chapters in the beginning of the document.

Chapter 1 now contains administrative text only. Less than a page long, Chapter 1 still contains the Scope and Purpose statements, a list of the fire alarm system classifications, and sections on retroactivity, equivalency, units and formulas, and code adoption requirements. To support the formal adoption by a jurisdiction, Annex D contains sample wording for enabling legislation. Note that the term “Annex” has replaced the term “Appendix” in describing the supplementary material appearing at the end of the *Code*.

The Committee has revised the units of measure throughout the document to state the SI units first, with the English units following inside parentheses. This will supposedly support the press toward converting the United States to the use of SI units. If I could pause here to editorialize just a moment, I will state that at my ripe old age I am not likely to make the transition to SI units

before I die. In fact, I am rather fond of the units of my youth. That is not to say that a movement to SI units is not inevitable, just that I don't really care for it very much.

Chapter 2 presents a list of publications actually referenced within the *Code*. This chapter appeared as Chapter 9 in the 1999 edition of the *Code*.

Chapter 3 only contains definitions. For ease of reference, each definition has been assigned a specific section number. And, speaking of section numbers, the numbering system has changed to conform to the *Manual of Style*. The hyphen (-) between the first Arabic numeral and the remaining numerals that designate a section has been replaced by a dot (.).

New or revised definitions include the following terms: "apartment building," "average ambient sound level," "certification," "day-care home," "dormitory," "dwelling unit," "effective masked threshold," "household fire alarm system," "proprietary supervising station fire alarm system," "fire warning equipment," "guest room," "guest suite," "hotel," "living area," "lodging or rooming house," "maintenance," "nonrequired (voluntary) system," "occupiable area," "octave," "one-third octave," "residential board and care occupancy," "residential occupancy," and "evacuation signaling zone."

Deleted definitions include the following terms: "communications channel," "parallel telephone type auxiliary fire alarm system," "noncoded signal," and "satellite trunk."

The Committee has made another improvement for the benefit of those who will make Public Proposals for revision to the definitions. The Committee has added a parenthetical reference after each definition that gives the name of the Technical Committee that has the responsibility for maintaining that particular definition.

Next issue, I will continue to present my summary of the important changes to NFPA 72-2002, *National Fire Alarm Code*, by presenting the changes to Chapter 4 and, possibly, beyond.

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