

Another New Edition?

by Dean K. Wilson, P.E.

***Question:* When the National Fire Protection Association released NFPA 72-2002, *National Fire Alarm Code*, in the late summer of 2002, I immediately purchased a copy of the document. Then, in the first part of 2003, when the *National Fire Alarm Code Handbook* became available, I again purchased a copy. As you have implied in your writings over the years, becoming familiar with these documents has made me a much better fire official. When I inspect buildings now, I can often find relevant sections of the *Code* that apply. My investment of time and energy in learning about the *Code* has made me better able to serve my community, help my constituents, and improve the overall fire safety here.**

Now I have learned that NFPA has released a new edition of the *Code*: NFPA 72-2007. I assume they will release a new *Handbook* soon, also. I suspect that I should once again make the investment of money, time, and energy to become familiar with the new *Code*. Do you agree?

***Answer:* Yes. By all means continue on the pathway you have laid out for yourself and become familiar with the new edition of the *National Fire Alarm Code*.**

At the same time that I make this wholehearted recommendation to you, I am also keenly aware of how frustrating it can become when one has to deal with changes to the documents with which one has become familiar.

When I entered the profession of fire protection engineering back in 1965, I found the industry in a time of great change. Lloyd Layman had researched the efficacy of the fog nozzle back during World War II at the Navy Fire Research Center and published his ground-breaking findings. But, many fire departments still clung tenaciously to the straight tip nozzles they had used for decades. I considered myself most fortunate that the fire chief of my first department had determined to drag the firefighters under his command into the midst of the latest technology. In my four-year tenure there, I saw the department enthusiastically adopt fog nozzles, move from compressed oxygen to compressed air in the self-contained breathing apparatus worn by the firefighters, and institute a complete change in tactical response to structure fires. And, I saw the wonderful results brought forth by these changes.

As I moved into a career with one of the three major industrial fire insurance companies, I also encountered a time of change. Based again, oddly enough, on Lloyd Layman's highly significant research, the automatic sprinkler industry had begun to use a redesigned automatic sprinkler in 1953. Sixteen years later, in 1969, many, many facilities still had old-style heads. Getting those heads replaced, where appropriate, and more scientifically analyzing the water supply available to feed those sprinklers brought about some truly dynamic changes to built-in fire suppression systems.

I witnessed the move from pipe schedule sprinkler systems to hydraulically calculated sprinkler systems. Why I remember seeing the first computer terminal communicating from Hartford, Connecticut via a teletype network with a main frame computer in Cleveland, Ohio, in order to verify the calculations on hydraulically designed sprinkler systems.

Likewise, I had the privilege of watching the protection for racked storage of materials evolve through a significant testing program conducted by various sponsors at the Factory Mutual

Research Center in West Glocester, Rhode Island. And, I saw a similar evolution of fire protection for whiskey stored in wooden barrels. In fact, at one test, I almost singed my hair.

So, what point am I trying to make, other than indicating what an old coot I am? I am trying to explain why one must keep up with developments stated in the various codes and standards, even when it seems far too difficult to do so.

Yes, new codes and standards may strain the pocketbook. Yes, one may have to “start all over again” in order to become familiar with the changes contained in a new code or standard. Yes, the process never really ends. But, the rewards in a dedicated individual’s personal development will always remain “priceless.”

I encourage you to become familiar with the new *Code*. NFPA 72-2007 contains numerous changes well worth noting. The new edition of the *National Fire Alarm Code Handbook*, scheduled to become available early next year, will also contain a wealth of updated commentary that should help novice users and experienced users alike gain a deeper understanding of the intent of the *Code*.

Oh, yes, I must admit that I am partial. After all, I did once again have the privilege of contributing to the writing of the *Handbook*. I consider such efforts part of my efforts to help further the cause of greater fire safety throughout our land. And, I am glad that God has continued to enable me to have the strength and ability to do so. Just as He has allowed me to write this column, lo these many years.

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