In My Opinion...
Dean Says:

The Game's Afoot

Charlene Kidder

I have long loved mystery novels. My training as a psychologist tells me that this great enjoyment of mystery novels stems from my desire to escape the reality of my daily life. If that is so, more's the pity. I still really, really love mystery novels.

Like most avid readers, I have my favorite authors. Lillian Jackson Braun and Sue Grafton top my current "best author" list. Though, I do think Grafton's earlier "alphabet series" books were better written than her later ones.

The "best of all time" mystery writer, for me at least, is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The Sherlock Holmes mysteries still bring me hours of enjoyment when I take up the hefty volume of Doyle's complete works and plunge into the stories.

One of Sherlock Holmes favorite ripostes to his sidekick Dr. Watson always gave me a sense of anticipation. "My dear Watson," Holmes would say, "the game's afoot." Soon thereafter, Holmes and Watson would find themselves deeply involved in solving some new bit of intrigue.

Over the last three years, I have noticed a trend. This trend has revealed itself in a variety of settings. I have observed it during discussions at meetings of various Technical Committees of NFPA 72, *National Fire Alarm Code.* I have read accounts that seem to point to this trend on the Automatic Fire Alarm Association's fire alarm listserver. I have heard murmurs that illustrate it during floor discussions at several NFPA Technical Sessions.

This trend manifests itself most often as a denigration of long term foundational principles on which various NFPA fire protection codes and standards rest. Let me give you some examples.

In various settings, certain individuals have repeatedly said or wrote statements that at their root seem to question the foundational principle that fire protection equipment should undergo testing by an organization acceptable to the various Authorities Having Jurisdiction, and subsequently receive a listing mark.

One rather cutesy question, in particular, seems to characterize this attitude: "Did you use 'listed' wire nuts?" The apparent assertion is that it is ridiculous to expect an installer to have to use wire nuts that bear a listing mark. In fact, the contrary remains quite true.

One foundational principle on which all of the NFPA fire protection codes and standards rely is that equipment used for fire protection purposes will be tested and listed by an organization acceptable to the authorities having juris-

diction. In the vast majority of the cases, two organizations provide this service: Underwriters Laboratories Inc. and FM Approvals.

Another foundational principle under attack finds embodiment in the question: "Doesn't that requirement belong in the building code?" The implication is either that NFPA codes and standards should not have any requirements that exceed those of the model building codes, or that certain types of requirements uniquely belong to the model building codes.

Again, the foundational principle of NFPA codes and standards is that they have valid use by both public and private Authorities Having Jurisdiction. These codes and standards may, in fact, be applied in many cases where a model building code is simply not involved.

While the importance of the model building codes and their derivatives cannot be lessened or ignored, the fact remains that sometimes the requirements of private AHJs, such as insurance companies or corporate policies, greatly exceed the rather minimum requirements of the model building codes. NFPA codes and standards must consider that a significant number of instances where their requirements will be cited will not involve the application of a model building code.

As sometimes happens with the mystery novels I read, the motive for this trend does not immediately seem apparent. I have spent some time lately trying to discern what the motive or motives might actually be. While I have not yet reached an unshakable conclusion, I think that the motive for this denigration of some of the foundational principles of the NFPA codes and standards represents a form of power struggle.

The same guy who said, "Follow the money," finished that paragraph by saying, "And, if the money leads you to a dead end, then follow the chain of power."

It very well may be that for some reason, those who seem to want to deni-

Wayne Says...

story to your attention because it is not an isolated case. These kinds of conversations happen all of the time. Maybe they happen because some engineers do not do a thorough enough job of reviewing fire alarm system submittals. Maybe it's because installers really don't know what they're doing. But whatever the reason, we have our work cut out for us. We all need to be vigilant and ensure that the engineers designing these systems understand the need for thorough reviews of submissions and a consistent enforcement of their specifications and the *National Fire Alarm Code.*

And, if you have the required expertise to interface with your peers and system designers, you should provide the guidance and training to improve what is all too often a less-than-professional approach to fire alarm system design and installation. ❏

Dean Says...

grate the foundational principles of the NFPA codes and standards see this form of public speech as a means of either gaining power, or of wresting power from those that they perceive have power.

"Well, my dear Watson, the game's afoot." In response, I think it is high time for those involved in the process of codes and standards development to spend some time investigating the historical basis for the document they help write. Find out the source of some of these important concepts, and recognize that tampering with the foundation will only serve to cause the structure to collapse. ❏

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