

In My Opinion...

Dean Says:



Charlene Kidder

Nationally known comedian and radio talk show host, Dennis Miller, has a phrase that he often uses when he describes a situation where various parties work cooperatively toward some goal, usually financial in nature. “Everybody wets his beak,” Dennis intones in a somewhat snarly voice.

Recently, “DM,” as I like to call him, explained that every time he uses that phrase he gets a sharply worded Instant Message from his wife of more than 20 years. He explains that if he uses that phrase in a public setting, his wife, Caroline, will look at him and roll her eyes. “I guess she doesn’t like the implication,” he recently told his radio audience.

I thought of the underlying concept of this bit of humor recently when a very well-meaning fire alarm contractor exclaimed, with some notable exasperation, “Codes, Schmodes! What purpose do the Codes actually fulfill?”

In an attempt to defuse the underlying ire expressed in her comment, I responded, “The Codes and Standards make certain that everybody wets his

beak.” You can imagine her response to my comment.

“What in the world does that mean?” she asked with a bit less anger than before.

The Codes and Standards create a level playing field for all the stakeholders involved in any given fire protection project. They make certain that all parties receive fair treatment. And, they help assure that every project, no matter where its location, will provide an equivalent level of protection for the occupants of the facility.

Think of the complete collection of the Codes and Standards as a great and impartial justice. As cases come before the bench, the Codes and Standards offer a just, fair, and impartial verdict. They help provide maximum protection for a reasonable cost. They make certain that every stakeholder—the owner of the property, the architect who designed the facility, the designer of the fire protection systems, the manufacturer of the fire protection equipment, the installer/maintainer of those systems, the Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJs), the occupants of the facility, and every other interested group or individual—realizes the satisfaction of whatever goals and objectives that particular stakeholder may have.

The Codes and Standards also provide reasonable, cost-effective, and consistent requirements. This helps make certain that the anticipated level of fire protection remains within measureably

tight parameters as occupants move from structure to structure within a particular facility, or across a wide-range of facilities. That consistent approach minimizes the aggregate risk of death or injury due to fire.

The Codes and Standards offer the owners of facilities the ability to manage their fire protection goals: life safety, property protection, mission continuity, heritage preservation, and environmental stability. The Codes and Standards also help the owners create policies, processes, and procedures to manage the risks represented by the various common hazards and special hazards inherent within their facilities.

The Codes and Standards provide designers with requirements that will guide their designs to assure a consistent application of fire protection knowledge gained over a very long period of time. Balanced committees of experts in various aspects of fire protection, who represent a wide range of specific interests, develop the Codes and Standards. The very nature of this balanced consensus approach to the development of the Codes and Standards creates an innate uniformity. That uniformity offers designers a well-thought-through foundation upon which to creatively fashion their designs.

The Codes and Standards offer a means for installer/maintainers of fire protection equipment to communicate effectively with Authorities Having Jurisdiction. The Codes and Standards form a “bridge to understanding” that allows the enforcement community to guide the installation community in a reasonable and thoughtful way. The Codes and Standards also give the installer/maintainers a consistent set of requirements that helps establish a reproducible means of implementing the intent of those designing the fire protection systems. The more familiar that an installer/maintainer becomes with the requirements of the Codes and Standards, the more uniform, exacting, and cost effective his or her installations will become.

The Codes and Standards ensure that “everybody wets his beak!” □

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