

## In My Opinion...

### Dean Says:



Charlene Kidder

## It's Easier to Just Say "No!"

As I answered the telephone, the caller said, "I need your help." That's a very frequent greeting I receive these days. Unable to travel due to disability from profound progressive osteoarthritis of the knees, hips, and back, I make my contribution to the business of fire protection by answering questions.

"What can I do to help," I replied. The caller, a good friend, works as the supervisor of maintenance for a large corporation that owns numerous hotels and restaurants.

"One of our multiple story hotels has a laundry chute. At the discharge in the basement, the chute has a listed door that appears at one time to have had a fusible link holding it in the open position. The link is gone, but the chain remains in place. I want to put this back into service because the housekeeping staff have been blocking the door open with a broomstick.

"I contacted our local fire protection equipment supplier. They sent out one of their technicians. He looked at the situation and reported back to his boss. The boss called me and said they

would not install a fusible link to hold open the door because I was trying to make something into an automatic fire door that was not intended to function that way. They won't install a fusible link. They say that doing so would too greatly increase their liability.

"I've done some research on the internet and discovered that the National Fire Protection Association has a standard on laundry chutes, NFPA 82-2009, *Standard on Incinerators and Waste and Linen Handling Systems and Equipment*. Can you help me determine what's really permitted?"

"Of course I'll help you," I replied.

A bit of research on my part and lo I discovered the following requirement:

**5.2.3.2.3** Chute discharge doors shall be permitted to be held open by a fusible link.

How about that? The very standard that provides requirements for linen handling systems permits the use of a fusible link to hold the discharge door open.

So, what's my point? If someone asks you to do something and you don't know what to do, here's a possible solution: It's easier to just say "No!"

Liability/Smiability! The fire protection contractor seems too lazy to do some research. Why, it took me less than 90 seconds to pull up an electronic copy of the appropriate NFPA standard, check the Table of Contents for a likely section, turn to that section, and locate

the appropriate reference. Including a few minutes of polite conversation with my friend, I was on the telephone about five minutes, tops.

How many times in the course of a business day does someone ask you a question and you respond with a "No!" before you even check to see what's actually required. There is absolutely nothing wrong with saying, "I don't know, but I'll look it up and get back to you."

Contractors and suppliers aren't the only ones guilty of this ploy either. Authorities Having Jurisdiction pull this stunt all the time.

Someone asks an AHJ a question. Rather than admitting that he or she does not have the answer, the AHJ says, "No!" I wonder how much money has been spent on fire protection equipment that wasn't really needed just because an AHJ didn't know what was really required?

No matter what role you play in the fire protection scenario, you have a responsibility to yourself and to your clients or constituents to do whatever research is necessary to give them a truthful, thorough, and fully thought-through answer.

You must supply the most cost-effective protection that will meet the appropriate codes and standards. If the minimum protection has limitations, then explain that to your clients and offer a reasonable upgrade to provide the appropriate level of safety.

If you do your job properly, carefully, intelligently, sincerely, honestly, and thoroughly you will not have to worry about liability. If you document your decision and your decision-making process, that documentation will prove very useful in the unlikely case where you end up having to defend yourself in some legal action.

Don't fall into the trap of taking the easy way out, just to quell your unreasonable fear of liability or to try to save face when you don't have the necessary information at hand. You will find that your clients or constituents will respect you all the more if you take time to do the needed research. □

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**Page 14**

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