



Charlene Kidder

In My Opinion...

Dean Says:

I Can't Believe I Missed It!

The inquiry began innocently enough. I received an e-mail from a fire marshal with whom I have worked for several years. He asked me: "With regard to Areas of Refuge, a communications installation employee insists that the *Americans with Disabilities Act* requires the communication device in Areas of Refuge/Rescue to be handsfree. I've searched the various codes and standards and I'm not seeing that."

I began my quest to help my friend by doing what I always do, I searched the *ADA*. Then I searched the *Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines* (ADAAG). Next, I spent time searching through ANSI A117.1. I then turned to the *International Building Code-2009* and *International Fire Code-2009*.

I found quite a lot of useful information regarding communications systems for Areas of Refuge, but nothing that required handsfree operation. So, I wrote my fire marshal friend an e-mail in which I quoted a number of relevant sections from the various documents.

I reported to him that I could not find any reference to a requirement for

handsfree operation of the communication equipment for Areas of Refuge.

I felt a bit uneasy as I pressed "Send." "Surely I'm missing something," I thought to myself.

The very next day, I started to edit this edition of *TM-WSR* and read through Wayne Moore's commentary on Chapter 24 of NFPA 72-2010, *National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code*®. Toward the end of his most excellent article—which you can read beginning on page one of this issue—some of the *Code* citations leaped off the page:

24.5.3* Area of Refuge (Area of Rescue Assistance) Emergency Communications Systems.

A.24.5.3 "Areas of refuge" or "areas of rescue assistance" are areas that have direct access to an exit, where people who are unable to use stairs can remain temporarily in safety to await further instructions or assistance during emergency evacuation or other emergency situation. It is, therefore, important that a method to communicate between that location and a central control point where appropriate action for assistance be initiated.

24.5.3.1* Where required by the building code in force, an area of rescue assistance two-way emergency communications system shall be installed in accordance with 24.5.3.

A.24.5.3.1 Generally, the building code or engineer specification will provide the specifics on the required locations of the

remote area of refuge (area of rescue assistance) stations, as well as the central control point.

24.5.3.2 The area of refuge (rescue assistance) emergency communications system shall be comprised of remotely located area of refuge stations and a central control point.

24.5.3.3 The remote area of refuge stations and the central control point shall communicate with each other.

(—sections omitted—)

24.5.3.6 The area of refuge station shall provide for handsfree, two-way communication provide an audible and visible signal to indicate communication has occurred and indicate to the receiver the location sending the signal.

There! Right there! Right in front of me! 24.5.3.6!!!

You see, the one document that I did not search during my lengthy research the day before: NFPA 72-2010. It never occurred to me that NFPA 72 would have any requirements relating to communications systems for Areas of Refuge.

I have spent virtually all of my working life immersed in the *Code*. I will put my knowledge of the history of the development of various *Code* sections up against anybody else that I know. In fact, much of my work has come from helping people understand what the *Code* means.

So, how could I miss this very important section? Quite simple. It's relatively new and I have never had occasion to have an application that required me to carefully read Chapter 24 word-by-word.

We always tell people not to try to memorize requirements of the *Code*. They change too often to benefit from memorizing them. Yet, I have fallen prey to the very complacency that keeps many people from maintaining a high level of awareness of changes to the requirements in the *Code*.

I hope you will benefit from my error. Don't become complacent. Keep up to date. When a new edition of the *Code* becomes available, study it carefully.

If you do, you won't miss a key requirement that you need to know. □

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