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## In My Opinion...

### Dean Says:

# The Controversy Continues— Part 1

One aspect of NFPA 72-2010, *National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code*®, that connects this edition with all previous editions rests in the fact that controversy regarding certain requirements within the *Code* will always exist.

One particular controversy continues to plague Authorities Having Jurisdiction as they try to sort out the proliferation of alternative service providers offering telephone services that may also transport alarm signals.

Not long ago, consumers living in the United States had just one provider of telephone services: the public telephone utility, also referred to as the “authorized common carrier.” Regulated by the state or commonwealth public utility control authorities (PUCA)—and also by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)—the public telephone utility offered a list of services described by specific documents filed with the PUCA called “tariffs.” These documents outlined very precisely the specific details of each of the service offerings.

But now consumers have an ever-increasing range of service providers

offering telephone services. Some of these use the backbone of the internet to provide connectivity from point to point. Others already have their own communications network, such as the cable television companies.

NFPA 72-2010 attempted to recognize this proliferation and also tried to get its arms around the technology associated with this proliferation. But a lot of misunderstanding and controversy remains.

I have decided to spend time in this space trying to help you sort out the offerings available and which of those offerings truly complies with the requirements of the *Code*.

First of all, you need to understand that historically the *Code* has treated the communications pathway provided by the authorized common carriers as a “black box.” The *Code* provided requirements up to the input side of the black box and also from the output side of the black box to the ultimate destination of the fire alarm signal. Part of the reason for this turning of a blind eye as to what went on within the black box came from the stark reality that the *Code* had no way of exercising control over an entity that already had very strict control placed on it by the PUCA and the FCC.

This blind eye did not exist in total darkness. The authorized common carriers submitted all of their tariffs as publicly available documents. If you wanted to discover the details of any particular service offering, all you had

to do was read the tariff.

In addition, as telephone service became commonly available in the 1930s, the authorized common carriers responded to the urgings of the PUCA and built in certain key redundancies to assure the availability of telephone services during certain emergencies.

For example, the power supply that operated the telephone system originally resided at centralized locations and consisted of batteries, or a combination of batteries and generators, that could sustain the operation of the system for several days, or even longer.

No one had to question the integrity of the standby power supplies for the telephone system. The capacity far surpassed any length of time that someone might reasonably require. But, after 1984, that all began to change.

Judge Harold H. Greene—may he rest in peace—presided over the case of the *United States vs. AT&T*. This case, originally filed in 1974 and settled by consent decree in 1982, alleged that AT&T used monopoly profits from its manufacturing arm, Western Electric, to subsidize its telecommunicatons network in violation of U.S. antitrust legislation. As a result of the Modification of Final Judgment (MFJ), in 1984 AT&T divided into seven regional holding companies.

This MFJ also introduced the concept of LATA (local access and transport area) and divided telephone service by markets into LATAs throughout the United States.

One of the major advantages of the Pre-MFJ AT&T system derived from the detailed standards by which the company maintained very tight quality control throughout the Bell system. The rigorous quality standards also provided a consistency in the level of service that validated the concept of “trusting” in the dependability and reliability of the “black box” as a means of transmitting fire alarm, supervisory, and trouble signals between a protected premises and a supervising station.

I will plan to continue this discussion and present additional pertinent details in the next issue of **TM-WSR**. □

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