



In my opinion...

DEAN SAYS:

"No Compromise!"

With my background in radio broadcasting, and with my contacts in the news department side of that industry in particular, from time to time I am asked to be a guest on one of the radio talk shows. This usually happens after some dramatic fire or other emergency incident occurs, sending the talk show producers scurrying for their source file on fire protection and emergency response.

Within hours of the bombing at the World Trade Center in New York one of my more favorite producers—*Prime Time America* on the Moody Radio Network—was on the phone asking if I could join the host on Monday afternoon's broadcast to discuss that incident and fire protection in general. Naturally I agreed to do so, since I am always looking for opportunities to spread the word about engineered systems and built-in fire protection.

The host that particular day, Wayne Shepherd, was sitting in for the program's regular host, Jim Warren. Since I had been one of Jim's guests quite a few times, he had gotten used to some of the rather frightening statistics concerning

fire in the United States. These were new information to Wayne, however, and he reacted with the incredulity that most civilians display when confronted with the reality that in spite of the fact that we spend more dollars per person on fire protection than any country in the world, we have the worst fire record.

As Wayne worked that fact through his mind, he asked all the normal kinds of intelligent and thoughtful questions that I would expect a newly-concerned citizen to ask. Quite expectedly, he did not like some of my replies.

"Why don't building owners provide the protection necessary to offer the occupants a truly safe environment?" he asked.

"Because they don't want to," I replied, somewhat flippantly, "and because no one makes them."

"But what about building codes and fire safety codes? Don't these help?" he rejoined.

"Of course they do," I answered. "But you would be amazed at how many cities and towns in the U.S. have no codes at all, or at best, outdated and ineffective regulations."

I continued by explaining that in many cases the codes offered a series of trade-offs: ways of reaching a compromise between various combinations of construction methods and protection features that would hopefully afford a satisfactory level of protection. Unfortunately, starting from this position of compromise, the quality of the design,

specification, manufacture, installation, testing, maintenance, and use of fire protection features and systems falls short of the standard of quality necessary to ensure that the building and occupants are safe from the ravages of a hostile fire.

"How can we turn this around," Wayne asked.

I told him about efforts of the National Fire Protection Association and insurance-related groups like the American Insurance Association's American Insurance Services Group, Inc. I emphasized the absolutely crucial fire research that the National Fire Protection Research Foundation is conducting on several significant fronts. I shared with him some of the success stories from the efforts of the Learn Not To Burn Foundation in the area of public fire education. And yet, all these efforts—as laudible and important as they are—still aren't enough. There have been victories in battle, but the war is far from won.

"Maybe you need a battle cry," Wayne suggested.

"Maybe that's exactly what we need," I returned. "A battle cry."

"What would make a good one?" he pondered.

"I think I know," I said. "No compromise!"

"No-compromise?"

"Yes. No compromise!"

No compromise over the decision to adopt a philosophy that requires a building owner to install the most effective protection system available. No compromise over the design, specification, manufacture, installation, testing, maintenance, and use of the fire protection systems. No compromise in providing effective, educationally-sound public fire protection education for our citizens. No compromise in staffing, equipping, and training our public fire departments and private fire brigades to meet the challenges of 21st century fire protection needs.

So, let us indeed adopt a battle cry as we relentlessly attack our common foe. And may the sound of "No compromise!" echo not only in the present, but out through those pages that historians have yet to write. □

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Page 12