In My Opinion...

Dean Says:

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Consider the Source Before You Follow the Advice

The age of instant electronic communication has literally transformed the way we share with one another. Every profession derives benefit from the enhanced communications. The fire alarm industry also realizes a significant advantage from this exciting new technology.

Several fire protection listservers have sprung up to allow people with similar interests to share ideas. Notable among these listservers, the forum sponsored by the National Associate of Fire Equipment Distributors (NAFED), firelist@halcyon.com, and the forum sponsored by the Automatic Fire Alarm Association, firealarm@egroups.com (formerly fire-alarm@halcyon.com) hold my particular interest.

Over the months, some very lively and informative discussions have occurred on both of these listservers. Occasionally, tempers flare or the sarcasm gets a bit out of hand, but usually the discussions give readers a wide variety of opinions from individuals who come from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Recently, it occurred to me that a danger does exist with these listservers. Or maybe I'm just an old fuss budget.

A list member had raised a question on the fire-list regarding the hydrostatic testing of the piping that serves the fire department connection. It seems that the member asking the question had recently been appointed fire marshal in his community. He had served for many years as a fire fighter. During that time, an event occurred at a building protected with automatic sprinklers that had made a lasting impression on him.

An alarm had been received from this building. Following the standard operating procedures of the department, the first due engine company connected two 2 1/2-inch lines to the fire department connection and proceeded to pressurize the connection to 150 psi. Within seconds the fire department connection burst sending sharp pieces of pipe flying in all directions. Fortunately, no one was injured, but the broken connection seriously impaired the fire department's ability to supplement the water volume and pressure to the automatic sprinkler system.

The new fire marshal was asking the members of the listserver to comment on the need to hydrostatically pressure test the piping that makes up the fire department connection in the same manner that the rest of the newly installed automatic sprinkler system piping must be hydrostatically pressure tested.

Within a few hours many messages had been posted to the list offering opinions regarding the need to perform the hydrostatic pressure test on this piping. However, one frequent contributor to the listserver, an individual whose sharp pen had garnered him quite a group of followers over the course of past discussions on the listserver, opined that such a test was useless exercise.

Immediately, a number of his supporters jumped on the list to second his sharp opinion. Soon a written battle of words was underway. Many individuals posted messages in favor of or opposed to the hydrostatic pressure testing of fire department connection piping. As the sarcasm level of the posted comments began to increase and some tempers seemed to rise, one lone contributor gave everyone on the listserver pause. He pointed out that NFPA 13-1999, *Standard for the Installation of Sprinkler Systems,* states:

> 10-2.2.3 Piping between the exterior fire department connection and the check valve in the fire department inlet pipe shall be hydrostatically tested in the same manner as the balance of the system.

You would have thought that this posting would have brought sanity to the listserver. But, no, the frequent contributor and his followers quickly changed tactics and suggested, as they often do, that the writers of the Standard just didn't understand the problems of the real world.

As I have often wondered in the past, I once again wondered how many of the lurking, but silent, members of the listserver had been misled by these comments. Why, the frequent contributor has a P.E. after his name. He writes so often and so authoritatively, how could he possibly be wrong?

The truth remains, whether you read the postings on a listserver, or even peruse the pages of a newsletter like this one, you must take into careful account the fact that you are reading someone's opinion. You should always carefully consider the source. Weigh every offered opinion against your own careful reading of the codes and standards.

And, always keep in mind that especially when you take *free* advice, you get exactly what you pay for. ❑

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