

In My Opinion...

Dean Says:

Change for the Sake of Change



“Change makes the world go around.” At least that sentiment seems to hold the imagination of many individuals both inside and outside of the corporate world. Pundits, from time to time, question whether or not change always makes something better. I usually smile when I read such remarks because the sentiment doesn’t say anything about “better.” It just says that change makes the world go around. It clearly does not say that it makes the world go around any faster, better, more efficiently, more effectively, or whatever improvement one might desire.

I think of this often when I review proposed changes to national fire protection codes and standards. Most of the requirements in the fire protection codes and standards have arisen from field situations where fires have occurred and caused significant property damage or loss of life. Oh, yes, some requirements have come from the fertile brains of code makers who imagined a particular problem and found a solution. But most of the truly significant requirements have come about following some

event or occurrence that cried out for a change to make the overall fire protection better.

Now I realize that some individuals in the code-making arena seem to delight in indicting the process. These folks claim that some type of “old boy’s network” exists to promulgate a whole raft of ridiculous requirements that only serve to make fire protection more expensive for, and thus less accessible to, the masses. Other individuals have made code-making a sort of power game. By trying to overturn long-standing requirements, these folks hope to show they have wrested power away from other individuals who participate in the code-making process.

I have had the honor and privilege of serving on one or more code-making committees since 1974. I have never considered that this service placed me into an “old boy’s network.” For the vast majority of those years I represented a major highly protected risk (HPR) insurance company. From that point of view, I brought to the table the experience gleaned from the company having insured very large industrial properties since 1890. An enormous database of experience came from the thousands of actual fire losses that had occurred during that time. Earlier representatives of the insurance company had played key roles in the development of the National Fire Protection Association, the National Board of Fire Underwriters, and other major organizations. In some

ways, I considered my representation on code-making committees to constitute a sacred trust passed on to me by those representatives who had gone before me. In the last almost five years of my active service, I had the honor and privilege of representing one of the most respected fire protection engineering consulting firms. From a new perspective I learned a very great deal about customer needs and the reality of cost vs. benefit. I, in turn, tried to bring this new information to the table at code-making committee meetings.

Over the years, I have seen quite a bit of new technology come onto the scene. Some of it has brought truly amazing improvements. Others have brought change, but, at least in some ways, have diminished the overall quality of fire protection equipment. For example, since mean-time-between-failure depends, in part, on the number of components in a piece of equipment, the more complicated the equipment the more potential for failure. That should not impede the addition of new technology. But it should make those who write requirements for implementing that new technology to do so cautiously. They should make certain that in gaining some valuable features sufficient requirements will reduce the impact the new technology might have on the overall integrity of the fire protection system.

Another code-making cycle of NFPA 72, *National Fire Alarm Code*, draws toward completion. As an older person now severely crippled by arthritis, I can no longer travel to the sites of the meetings. I miss the opportunity to learn and share with others who want to bring a spirit of continuous improvement to the fire protection codes and standards. I miss the lively debate from the diverse points of view represented on the committees. However, I do not miss the wrangling with those who want to bring about change simply to see what effect that change might have without having carefully considered the impact of that change on the overall integrity of the codes and standards.

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Wayne Says...

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vantage of all the training offered by the manufacturer of the equipment you sell and install. Getting it right means becoming aware of all of the software issues that can arise during a system installation and becoming aware of the latest revisions to that software and why the manufacturer made those revisions. Getting it right means understanding the requirements of the codes and standards and employing the correct installation methods to ensure an installation meets those requirements.

Getting it right means taking the time to learn how to install a fire alarm system correctly. □

Questions?

We've got answers!

Dean Says...

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So I guess these few paragraphs intend to serve as a cautionary tale to those still engaged in the process of writing codes and standards. Weigh each change very carefully. Make certain that the introduction of new ideas, new technology, or new techniques, does not degrade the integrity of the fire protection system. Remember that in many cases that integrity depends on a careful balance between a significant number of interlocking and interdependent variables. Don't let any hint of ego or one-upmanship cause a hasty acceptance of something new that will later prove fatal to the integrity of the codes and standards. □

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