



**In my opinion...**

**DEAN SAYS:**

## **Contractor Bashing**

While reviewing the Evaluation Forms for a workshop that Wayne and I recently presented in a major East Coast city, I was startled to read: "After attending this course, I think the AHJ's will be ready and willing to bust the contractors' butts, unfortunately, instead of working and cooperating with them."

"Contractor bashing," I thought. We've heard a lot in the news lately about attacks on various groups and organizations. "Insurance company bashing" is a hot topic among many of my peers following Ralph Nader's apparent victory in the recent California elections with the passage of Proposition 103. But what about "contractor bashing?" Could I really be charged with promoting an attitude among Authorities Having Jurisdiction that would hinder the cooperation with persons and organizations manufacturing, designing or installing signaling systems? Yes, I guess I really could be guilty of encouraging contractor bashing.

Much of my career has been spent trying to get people to do what the signaling systems codes and standards have

always said they were supposed to do. During the days when I spent almost all of my time reviewing systems proposed for installation at facilities insured by my employer, I often became a desk-pounding maniac, furious with some particular manufacturer, vendor or in-

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staller who was stretching a credible interpretation of the particular code or standard to the limit, if he or she was paying any attention to the codes and standards at all.

Literally hundreds of times I received the response, "but we've always done it that way." Sometimes patiently, more often quite impatiently, I would explain how this particular design or that one failed to meet the intent of the referenced code or standard.

Now it is true that during those years some very fine relationships were formed with some of those recalcitrant manufacturers, vendors and installers. A few of those relationships blossomed into good friendships which have lasted to this day. No doubt there are also some folks with whom I crossed swords who disdain me to this day.

Being an Authority Having Jurisdiction, I guess, is not for the weak-hearted. But to actually be accused of

contractor bashing has caused me to rethink some of my attitudes.

In workshops I have often rather proudly announced that in those days of reviewing systems I had a turn-down rate of over 90% of the jobs submitted. And while it may be true that in providing some critical guidance to those who submitted the jobs for review and approval I helped them ultimately gain approval for a system that met the intent of the codes and standards and would provide the customer with proper protection, I may have also unduly discouraged a host of others who began to find ways to work around the approval process.

Maybe this realization is part of the motivation for the creation of this newsletter. I know that the only reason I am taking the time to be a part of this venture is to help spread the word that code and standard-complying systems are superior systems. They are systems that the customers deserve to have installed.

They are systems that will produce fewer false alarms. They are systems that will afford a higher level of protection. They are the systems of which a good workman will not be ashamed.

So let me encourage my fellow AHJs to stop contractor bashing and start to develop a mindset of cooperation and encouragement, while holding up the standard of righteousness that complying systems represent.

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