



Building Codes: Turmoil In The Industry
by Doug Wilson, Myler Chief Estimator

Building codes basically control the design of a facility and regulate the use of building materials and methods so as to provide the maximum amount of safety and protection to the occupants of the building, the persons employed to build the facility, the property, and the surrounding property and public. These building codes are usually administered by local government officials.

Through the years, certain model codes and standards have evolved which a local municipality will select as the one it wants to use and adopt as law for its governing area. The most frequently adopted codes have included the Uniform Building Code authored by The International Conference of Building Officials and referred to as ICBO codes, the Basic Building Code authored by the Building Officials and Code Administrators and referred to as the BOCA codes, the Standard Building Code authored by the Southern Building Congress, International and referred to as the SBCCI codes. Other adopted codes include the National Fire Codes, the National Electric Code, National Fire Alarm Code, Life Safety Code, as well as a host of other codes, including the ones that local governments may impose for the construction of facilities.

In an effort to solidify and unify all of these different major model building codes into one family of codes that could be used anywhere in the United States, in 1994 ICBO, BOCA, and SBCII joined together to form an alliance called International Code Council (ICC). The model ICC building codes, being mostly completed in 1999, might have been the only national code standard with which architects and engineers had to contend. However, ICC stepped on the toes of NFPA by developing the ICC Electrical Code.

Now NFPA is also developing its own family of major model building codes called the Consensus Codes that will be completed in 2002 and will compete directly with the ICC building codes. Unless NFPA and ICC come to some kind of consensual agreement, architects and engineers will still be faced with two different national codes, with one or the other being adopted by each and every municipality across the country. There will be no one single standard as everyone had hoped for when ICC began their work.

