

## Taking the Bull by the Horns

by Brooks H. Baker III

Some of you may recall that I grew up on a cattle ranch in Alabama and enjoy sharing some of the experiences of my youth and what I learned from them. When I was a teenager, I was out one day repairing fences, a very common chore on a cattle ranch. On this particular cold and windy day, I was repairing a fence that was constructed of hog wire that was four feet tall and barbed wire above the hog wire nailed to railroad cross ties.

The fence was constructed in this high-strength manner because it was where we kept our bulls during their “off season.” The fence was built very strong so that the bulls could not easily tear it down and get into the herd of cows where they tended to really enjoy the conversation with the females more than with each other (at least that’s what my Mom always told me).

This particular fence had suffered from a falling limb which had knocked out quite a few staples. I was bent over, working on the bottom part of the fence, hammering staples into the wooden post, and unfortunately not paying much attention to what was going on around me. As I was in this bent-over position with a hammer in one hand and a staple in the other, I was surprised by a sharp pain in my backside as my feet left the ground and I sailed completely over the fence. As I was lying there on the ground and looking up, I saw two large brown eyes and 2,000 pounds of Black



Angus bull looking down at me with a rather amused look on his face. Fortunately, he was one of our friendly bulls who normally behaved without malice, and I believe his question was “wanna play?”

That memory is brought to mind on many occasions when similar experiences occur regarding codes and standards and the process by which they are established or modified. Many times I have been happily working away here at my job at the university when a notice comes across my desk like the one telling me that now I have to replace all of my hydraulic elevator cylinders with some expensive replacement as a result of a new standard that someone thought was a good idea. I suddenly felt that sharp pain in my backside again as I was looking at the new requirement, which caught me totally by surprise.

Just a couple of months ago, we were informed by our Local Authority Having Jurisdiction (LAHJ) that the wiring for the fire pumps in two research buildings under construction was not in compliance with a requirement of NFPA 70. We questioned this and our design engineers who do work all over the country had never seen the code interpreted in this manner. But when we contacted NFPA

(National Fire Protection Agency), the response was that with the wording the way it is, the LAHJ may interpret the code that way. As a result, we had to spend tens of thousands of dollars removing the electrical services in the fire pumps and pulling new service to them. Once again, I felt that sharp pain in my backside as I was looking up into the figurative eyes of that 2,000-pound bull again.

It looks like we are about to be surprised again. New requirements outlined in the proposed 9th Edition of UL864 are apparently moving forward creating “proprietary systems” that will prevent us from being able to utilize devices in fire alarm systems unless they are specifically listed for and by that manufacturer and model of system.

What this means to us as owners is that when we need to go back and add notification appliances or detection devices on a system, we cannot do so unless that particular control panel is listed with that particular device or appliance. If we have a renovation project and the fire alarm system is, let’s say, 15 years old, we will experience great difficulty in finding devices or appliances listed for a newly listed fire alarm control panel. The new panel will most likely require us to remove all the notification appliances and four-wire devices, as they will not be “compatible” with the new front end of the system.

The question will no longer be if it meets the criteria required to function from a design standpoint, but will shift to just a question of UL labeling for specific devices. The technical aspects of this are too detailed for a short discussion, but I am told that this requirement may severely limit our opportunity for competitive

---

**Brooks Baker is a Past APPA President and the associate vice president for facilities at the University of Alabama, Birmingham. He can be reached at [bbaker@fab.uab.edu](mailto:bbaker@fab.uab.edu).**

## The bottom line is that we need to be paying attention to what is going on in the confusing world of codes and standards.

bidding; it will surely lock us into one manufacturer for the life of the system, even though what we have installed in the past functions perfectly well and meets all installation codes and standards. Based on these newly proposed requirements, it is our understanding that retrofit projects will become very expensive, maintenance contracts could escalate, replacement parts could become expensive, and for what?

What can you do to stop all of us from feeling that sharp pain in the backside which we periodically get by surprise when something has gone awry in the codes and standards process?

October 2005 was the last meeting of this cycle for the members of the National Fire Alarm Code Technical Committee on Testing and Maintenance of Fire Alarm Systems. Each of the NFPA Codes is on a revision cycle of approximately three years, and the committee with responsibility for oversight of these codes meets two or three times during that three-year period. The committee meets to review changes, additions, or deletions to the code as recommended by the public and to recommend changes that the committee deems appropriate. Hundreds of public proposals may be received and each must be carefully reviewed and addressed by the committee. This process can be rather laborious and at times tedious, but it has a significant opportunity to impact our construction and operating costs.

Being a long-time member of NFPA 72 Testing and Maintenance Committee has provided me many opportunities to tell the owner's side of the story when discussing the pros and cons of implementing new requirements or modifying old

requirements of the code. Our particular committee is made up of a reasonable and cooperative group of individuals who typically do not allow their emotions to override their common sense. Without representation from the owners of facilities, people like you, we are missing an important voice at the codes and standards tables.

The bottom line is that we need to be paying attention to what is going on in the confusing world of codes and standards. As individuals we need to be watching publications that inform us of impending changes to the various and numerous codes and standards that impact our facilities and our institutions. We then should communicate these back to the APPA office so that we can disseminate information to the membership for possible action.

We need representation on committees that are important to our industry. We currently have opportunities for representation on NFPA 110 which deals with emergency power. This would be a good opportunity for someone to get involved and to have an impact on the cost of our facilities. We would like to have someone representing the interest of higher education on the NFPA 101—Life Safety Code and on several ASHRAE committees. Now is the time to let us know of your interests and we will begin the process to provide opportunities for involvement.

There may be a misconception that most codes only apply to new construction and they will not impact the responsibilities and work of those responsible for plant operations. Codes and standards do impact almost every feature of new construction, but they also impact our plant operations extensively. For instance,

testing and maintenance of fire alarms, sprinkler systems, fire pumps, emergency power systems, means of egress and other parts of our built environment are all addressed in various codes and standards. The cost of operating a building is impacted significantly by the frequencies and procedures which are required. That is exactly the reason I chose to participate on the Testing and Maintenance Committee of NFPA 72.

Be knowledgeable about codes, be in compliance, and be a participant! If you wish to know more about how you can help APPA membership through participation in codes and standards, contact our Vice President for Professional Affairs Alan Bigger at alan.s.bigger.1@nd.edu or you can contact me at bbaker@fab.uab.edu. 🏢

### **AIS** Technical Training Center

Grand Opening - Training Center

#### Attention Facilities

*Steam Plants, Heating Plants  
Power Plants, Boilers, High  
Temperature Hot Water  
Heating Systems*

Training Classes & Courses now available

- First Class Technical Training Center -
- Specific Instructions Starting \$230 -
- Licensing or Certificates -
- Certified Instructor -
- Hands-on Equipment -



Boiler Firemen

Steam Stationary Engineers - Chief Engineers  
Mechanics or Operators

**\$\$\$ Training Payback \$\$\$**  
Long-Term Savings with Short-Term Rewards

**45 Day Pre-Registering 30% Off**  
- Discounts for Multiple Students -

1-800-249-0959 x113

<http://www.ais-technical-training.com>