



How the System of Codes and Standards Works

By Kevin Folsom

As chair of APPA's Code Advocacy Task force, I offer the following FAQs to help new facility managers grasp control of the codes and standards that are in their midst.

What are your responsibilities related to compliance activities? How have those responsibilities changed?

All of them fall under my responsibility – ADA, NFPA, environmental, etc. We try to proactively deal with those through facility renewal and planned efforts. Occasionally, the compliance issue comes to us before we have renewal. So we're trying to comply but not utilize all of our funds (or waste funds) on those compliance issues before we get to the renewal. There's a balance that we have to work through. Pressing non-compliance issues are definitely motivators for planning renewal.

What are your top regulatory priorities, both now and in the future?

They're all important. We don't necessarily question the importance of regulatory priorities. The challenge comes with timing and feathering them into facility renewal so we can get full life-cycle value of a revised component.

What types of regulations and guidelines demand more time and resources to comply? Why?

ADA would be the most comprehensive because it involves so many other planners and leaders on campus. But a really close second would be environmental

as it relates to energy use and recycling, because it affects the behaviors of every single person on campus.

What are the most common resources or strategies you use to keep up on the latest standards and guidelines?

First you need to understand how the system works. The government relies on private industry (manufacturers, buyers, etc.) and nonprofit organizations (NFPA, ASHRAE, etc.) predominantly

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for codes and standards development. While the government sets the course for big-picture goals, they're tapping into manufacturers, and buyers who sit on committees to develop and refine these codes and standards. Sitting on a committee is the most effective way to stay on the cutting edge. However, the committee members are required

to pay for all their own travel and time to participate, which can be costly and time-consuming.

So the committees function something like this: The manufacturers lean toward language in codes that help them sell more products (after all this is the primary impetus for their companies to pay for them to participate); the buyers

lean toward codes that minimize spending (i.e., primary impetus is to spend money and time to minimize cost and time later); and the non-profit organizations want to sell codes and standards publications.

I don't describe it this way to make everyone sound purely like self-interest groups. The reality is that really good work is being accomplished. It's just that this is the elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about.

As a result of this scenario, manufacturers that stand to benefit most from code changes are eager to advertise and write articles about the changes. And the nonprofits provide magazines for these articles and advertisements to be published, which help disseminate the information.

What are cost considerations related to compliance activities?

It requires a lot of time. I could probably spend as much as 20 percent of my time solely on monitoring codes and standards and staying involved to make sure they're appropriately written and cost-effective. It's difficult for school leadership to allocate resources to facility managers to participate on committees and attend conferences, because they are unable to see substantial benefits immediately.

What is the role of maintenance and engineering staff in complying with regulations and standards?

They're typically on the whip's end. By the time a new or updated code comes to them all the momentum cannot be stopped. They simply have to deal with it and try to help their leadership understand why they need to spend time and money to comply.

For managers new to maintenance and engineering management, what are the first steps they need to take related to compliance?

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What type of feedback do you receive from occupants and visitors related to compliance activities?

ADA would be the one that is most often brought up by building users and visitors. But we also have people who seem to be getting ill a lot and want to blame the facility. So we simply have them fill out the proper complaint forms then begin the investigation as needed.

CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this article was not to give the reader all the answers in codes and standards, but rather, to explain how the system works. These codes and standards come from years of work, and from thousands of volunteers working with funds from the institutions they represent. It is important for facility managers to be involved in this ongoing work.

Fortunately for APPA members, the APPA Code Advocacy Task Force does most of the work for its members by collaborating with each other and strategically participating on the code and standards development committees. All members need to do is contribute feedback to comment solicitations on the APPAinfo listserv. If you’re not the right person to contribute, forward it to the right one. A few meaningful

words are better than none at all. Most of the influence comes in numbers of those who contribute comments to these inquiries.

Finally, if you are participating on a code and standards development committee, please let me know so that we can include you in the APPA Code Advocacy Task Force dialog. ☎

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