

NFPA 5000 vs. ICC CODES

The following is a summary of key findings and reports by different groups or individuals that have spent time analyzing the two major code writing bodies which are being considered for use as base documents for California's Code.

National Association of Home Builders and California Building Industry Association

A review of 115 topics on Fire Safety, General Provisions, Means of Egress and Structural provisions indicated a clear preference for the ICC and dissatisfaction with NFPA.

- NFPA will adversely impact house affordability without demonstrated need or benefit to homebuyers.
- NFPA did not recognize house affordability as a major determination in the development of NFPA 5000 and promoted instead the consideration of costly property protection requirements.
- The existence of two competing sets of national building codes will result in substantial additional costs to builders, design professionals and ultimately home buyers in terms of resources necessary to participate in multiple jurisdictions to learn two sets of code requirements and will increase potential for costly construction errors due to confusion.
- In effort to expedite publication of their code, NFPA often references the provisions that appear in other documents. To fill in such holes, California agencies will be forced to draft and adopt substantial amendments to make it usable by those in the field. This will be very time consuming and very costly.
- NFPA provided inadequate levels of voting representation.

Design Professionals

- NFPA does not have a residential code.
- NFPA code change process involves 20+ interest groups
- NFPA has 15 communities vs. IBC's 4.
- NFPA allows all members to vote and although IBC allows input from all groups, but only regulatory officials can vote (non-special interest groups)
- No current handbooks or interpretive manuals are available through NFPA
- No evaluation service for product approvals is in place through NFPA

Portland Cement Association

An analysis of 37 conditions indicated that IBC offered superior protection in 13 cases, NFPA offered superior protection in 7 cases and the remaining 17 cases rendered equivalent protection.

Window and Door Manufacturers Association

Approximately 18 standards were analyzed. General consensus indicated NFPA provisions were vague or didn't exist in a majority of subject areas, which were otherwise addressed in the IRC.

International City/County Management Association

ICC's building code was developed primarily by the building officials and code enforcement officers employed by cities and counties. As public servants under the general direction of city/county managers, local building officials have, as their primary concern, broad general interest of local government and the citizens they serve. In contrast, NFPA process was more susceptible to being shaped by narrow special interest.

California Building Officials

- The question why NFPA 5000 is needed, and is it equal or better than IBC has not been adequately answered by NFPA
- NFPA historically understands the needs of fire officials in the fields of fire protection and fire code regulations, but lacks understanding of the needs of building officials and those involved in the enforcement of building code regulations.
- Building Officials were surprisingly absent from the list of NFPA code development committee members.
- If NFPA is used, California would be different from all other states. Uniformity in the nation was the reason for forming the ICC as a cooperative code body made from all 3 national model code groups.
- NFPA does not have a certification program that building officials rely on for support in plan checks and deputy/special inspection services.
- NFPA does not have a building product evaluation program.
- NFPA does not have educational outreach programs for building officials.
- Some references in the NFPA index are non-existent in the code text. There are also references to International Codes as well as a myriad of standards, making the codes bulky and the task of finding the requirements unfriendly to the user.

California Building Officials Tri-Chapter (East bay/Monterey/Peninsula)

- NFPA is more cumbersome-uses reference standards only and lack prescriptive requirements of IBC
- NFPA does not incorporate any conventional construction provisions
- NFPA lacks many administrative provisions- City by City Ord. Required
- NFPA-slows plan check and processing due to performance standards and "reasonable" compliance vs. prescriptive provisions as with IBC
- NFPA format is different than any of the previous national model codes. More difficult transition

- NFPA does not have a “simplified method” for designing seismic
- NFPA lacks structural Quality Control/Structural Observation provisions offered in IBC
- NFPA lacks masonry chimney prescriptive requirements and requires engineered design
- NFPA lacks essential provisions for wood design and refers to other standards

Fire Prevention Officers- So Cal

The task group used the plan review process as opposed to provision-by-provision comparison to study the NFPA and ICC codes. The findings were handed out at the Chapter meeting and copies are available by contacting the Chapter Secretary, Scott Fazekas (949)475-2901 or e-mail Laura Blaul at laurablaul@ocfa.org. The findings are available on the web-site.

The commentary showed clear preference for the ICC Codes and clear dissatisfaction with the NFPA Code. The summary statement said “it is our opinion that our communities, firefighters, and fire service will best be served participating in the ICC development process”.