



editorial

Building Codes

"What Have They Done To Us?"

By Robert B. Paullus, Director, NCSEA Board

Early in my career, I worked for a Fortune 500 company that manufactured steel plate. For the most part, the codes we worked under were different than the model building codes. Since our company had a history in code and standard development, the opinion of the vast majority of my colleagues was that our people adequately addressed the needs of our industry through these codes. Each subsequent revision was thought to represent a positive advancement in technology, and to result in a better product.

Since leaving that industry and moving into building design, I have heard numerous critical comments regarding changes in the model building codes and standards. The reaction of many engineers associated with the building industry may be best expressed by the often-heard exclamation, "Look what THEY have done to us now!" The release of the International Building Code in 2000 only made matters worse.

"The more you understand the process, the more tolerant you become..."

Since I have had the opportunity to be involved with NCSEA, I have begun to see a change in attitude regarding revisions to the codes. It seems that those engineers who are involved in the code development process, and who take the time to evaluate the content of the building codes, are more likely to be in favor of continued code development and have a favorable opinion of the codes and standards. The more you understand the process, the more tolerant you become; and, if you're not directly involved on an issue in question, you at least feel that you have access to the people who are involved.

An incredible number of opportunities exist for NCSEA members to become involved, and to make a difference. We are also fortunate to have a number of experts in structural engineering who are eager to share their knowledge with those of us willing to work and learn. The need to establish and maintain high standards

of care in the practice of the profession requires considerable work, especially when it comes to the maintenance of our codes and standards.

These documents cannot stagnate. They must be analyzed and modified to reflect changing technology, advancements in knowledge, and new means of providing the design and construction of projects. Codes of the past do not reflect the strides made in understanding the forces of nature, and the capacity of man and materials to resist those forces.

From the young engineer to the seasoned expert, there are ample ways to contribute and to be a positive part of the challenges that face our profession. My advice to you is to get involved. Be a part of the solution. Opportunities exist at the local, state, and national levels to be a contributor. Now that structural engineers have direct involvement in the development of the IBC and NFPA codes, the opportunities to have meaningful input is greater than ever before. With NCSEA's creation of the code advisory committees, there is no shortage of work. As we become more involved, we can change the phrase from "Look what THEY have done to us to now..." to "Look what WE were able to accomplish." ■

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DeStefano Associates
Fairfield, CT
203-254-7131

jimd@destefanoassociates.com

Executive Editor

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NCSEA
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312-372-8035

ncsea@structuremag.org

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cbi1984@aol.com

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dbiggs@ryanbiggs.com

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Hermosa Beach, CA
310-937-4846
rawn1@gte.net

Steven Schaefer, P.E.

Steven Schaefer Associates
Cincinnati, OH
513-542-3300
ses@ssastructural.com

Greg Schindler, P.E., S.E.

KPFF Consulting Engineers
206-622-5822
gregs@kpff.com

Dennis Tewksbury, P.E.

Dennis Tewksbury Consultant
Concord, NH
603-641-5006
dntewksbury@prodigy.net

Editorials are provided by the leadership and staff of the STRUCTURE Editorial Board, NCSEA, CASE and SEI on a rotational basis.

NCSEA Code Advisory Committees Contacts

Jim Delahay

Code Advisory Chair
jdelahay@lbyd.com

Melvyn Green

Existing Buildings
mgreenassoc@earthlink.net

Stephanie Young

General Engineering
Stephanie@mattsonmacdonald.com

David Bonneville

Seismic Provisions
dbonne@degenkolb.com

Jim Robinson

Quality Assurance
jim@robinsonengineers.com