

Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety's Building Code Resources

Building Code Frequently Asked Questions



What is a building code?

- A building code is the minimum acceptable standard used to regulate the design, construction, and maintenance of buildings for the purpose of protecting the health, safety and general welfare of the building's users.

Why are building codes needed?

- Codes promote the building of safe and durable structures, safeguarded from incidents such as fires and electrical malfunctions, as well as natural disasters. They also increase the safety and integrity of structures, thereby reducing deaths, injuries and property damage.
- Statewide building codes – and adequate enforcement – play a vital role in public safety and loss prevention, which can reduce the need for public disaster aid and increase a community's resilience
- Codes establish predictable and consistent minimum standards that help to assure the quality of construction materials, products and systems used in buildings.



What are the major benefits of adopting and enforcing a strong code?

- Building codes promote a level and predictable playing field for everyone involved in the development process – from designers, builders and suppliers to buyers, who are entitled to rely on construction of a safe, sound building.
- Inspection during construction provides peace of mind and third-party verification that code compliance has been achieved. On average, 10 inspections are conducted to homes, offices or factories to verify conformity to minimum standards.
- Safe buildings are achieved through proper design and construction practices and a code administration program that ensures compliance. Home and business owners have a substantial investment that is protected through complete code enforcement.
- Codes provide uniformity in the construction industry. This uniformity permits building and materials manufacturers to do business on a larger scale and pass cost savings on to the consumer.
- A study done by the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS) following Hurricane Charley in 2004 found that modern building codes reduced the severity of losses by 42 percent and loss frequency by 60 percent.

Who sets modern building code standards?

- Modern codes are consensus documents based on established scientific and engineering principles, drafted through input from leading technical experts, construction professionals, enforcement personnel and the products industries.
- The International Code Council (ICC), which was founded in 1994 with the purpose of streamlining the building regulatory system through a single

family of model building codes, has developed the most widely adopted set of codes to unify the U.S. building regulatory system.

- The ICC's model building codes are updated on a three-year cycle. The latest building and residential editions are the 2015 International Building Code (IBC) and 2015 International Residential Code (IRC). In addition, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is a major player in the development of codes. Their fire and electrical safety codes are widely used throughout the United States.
- A listing of the building codes in effect for each state is available on IBHS' website at www.disastersafety.org/building-codes.

Why doesn't every state have a code?

- Increased up-front costs are a major concern; however, cost/benefit studies have demonstrated strong positive long-term benefits for homeowners when communities implement individual code provisions as well as adopt newer building codes with stronger wind provisions in hurricane-prone areas and stronger seismic provisions in earthquake-prone regions. A study conducted by Texas A&M University on Texas Department of Insurance hurricane-related building requirements found that the benefits of adopting hurricane-related code provisions exceeded the costs by a factor of 4.5 to 7, depending on the size of the home. Also, a study by Dames & Moore on the benefits of adopting new seismic codes in Utah and Los Angeles found the benefits exceeded the costs by a factor of 4 in Utah and 16 in Los Angeles.
- Some construction trade groups oppose the need for training and licensing for members by claiming that, as implemented, these programs frequently just add bureaucracy and cost, because little training actually occurs in some jurisdictions. However, when properly implemented and administered, the training and licensing process can help protect consumers against poor workmanship and fraud, which benefits the entire community.