

Roofing codes and permits: do we need them for every job?

o roofing codes and standards represent yet another example of the government meddling in your business? Do you get anything in return for the fees you pay for your building permits, or are these charges just another way for the officials to tax the construction industry?

The answers to these questions may depend in part on where you live and the professionalism of the contractors and building officials in your area. In some parts of the country, outside regulation of roofing practices may seem unnecessary. In these localities, roofs are being applied by companies that have been in the business for three or four generations, and everyone trusts these firms to do good work.

In other regions, where new people and businesses have been pouring in, a five-year-old company may be considered established. In this environment it's much harder to tell the fly-by-nighters from the professionals without an objective third party regulating the industry through building codes and permits. A good roofing contractor in such a competitive market will have nothing to fear from roofing codes, but the illegitimate contractors will find that the codes prevent them from applying substandard roofing.

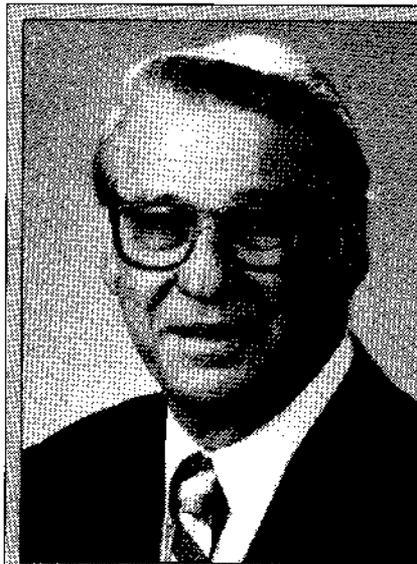
If your location requires licenses and permits, then you are not receiving full value for the money you are paying out unless you visit with your building department to ensure that all roofing is installed according to your adopted code. Complying with codes can be costly. When codes require you to include in your bids items such as felt un-



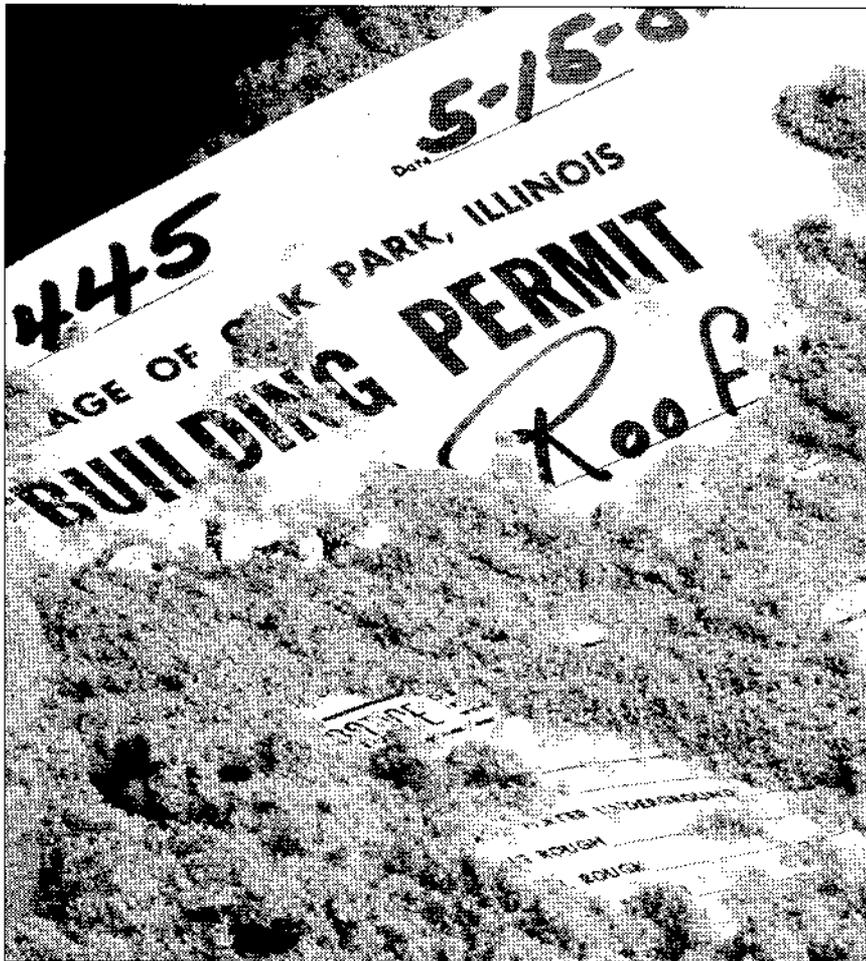
derlayment, eavesdrips, four nails in each shingle, rosin paper on flat roofs, flashing for plumbing pipes and electrical stand poles, and ice protection, it can make your prices less competitive than another contractor's bid that doesn't include these items. Since you will be following the minimums the code requires, it is only fair that the contractors you must compete with follow them as well.

Even pros ignore the codes

Unfortunately, even the professionals in some areas are ignoring the building codes and avoiding the permit process, saying the regulations are more trouble than they're worth. It's not the codes and permits themselves that the contractors object to. Rather, it's the way the rules are enforced that discourages some firms from using the codes to their advantage. Contractors often cite in-



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spector inexperience as one of the reasons codes are ineffectively administered. The contractors also complain that in some areas inspections aren't even conducted because the local building officials lack the time, care or expertise to do their jobs.

These shortcomings can be corrected. With help from the industries that stand to benefit from strong code enforcement, building officials can be educated and poorly written codes can be changed. If your governmental entities have adopted a roofing code, it is your responsibility to teach the code enforcers what to look for. For example, when the Southern Building Code Congress (SBCC) adopted a roofing standard in 1976, the Florida Roofing, Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors Association held short seminars around the state at meetings and conventions of building officials to assist them in interpreting the code.

If there are parts of your code that you do not like, it will be to your benefit to have these parts replaced with more acceptable provisions. Introducing changes into your local code may not be as hard as you think. Most local jurisdictions follow one of three model codes, and the groups that develop and update these model codes will consider proposed changes from any individual or group. At the appropriate hearings, you can present your arguments for accepting your modification to the model code. If the delegates to this hearing find that you have a valid proposal, your change will be adopted. Generally, the local codes that are based on the model code will then adopt the change as well. Changes may also be possible on the local level.

The modification process is not always this easy, however. Sometimes proposals are not accepted and adopted on the first try. If your proposal is voted down at first, you may need to lobby for support from other interested groups before approaching the code group again. This should not discourage you. If your reasons for seeking a change are sound and others in the industry are backing you, you will most likely get the modification you want. You will be successful as long as you remember that achieving code adoptions and changes takes a combination of selling and politics.

Changing steps

It might be helpful to outline one model code's change procedure to give you some idea of the steps involved. The process I will describe is for modifying the code developed by the Southern Building Code Congress. The codes developed by the International Conference of Building Officials (ICBO) and the Building Officials and Code Administrators International, Inc., (BOCA) have similar change procedures.

The code change process begins with a submission of the proposed change to the code-making body. For the SBCC, these proposals must be received at the Congress' headquarters in Birmingham, Ala., on or before March 1 of each year. The other two code-making groups have different deadlines.

During March and April, SBCC compiles all of the proposals it has received and publishes them in a booklet it distributes to all of its members, which include building officials, governmental agencies and other industry associate members. In July, the Congress conducts hearings, usually in Birmingham, where friends and foes of the proposed changes can present their arguments to a revision committee. During these hearings, you can suggest minor changes to your proposal or to someone else's proposal if it is on the floor.

After the pros and cons of each proposal are discussed, the committee makes its recommendation to the Congress' general membership. The committee's statement will either support the change, oppose the change or suggest that the proposal be held for further hearings. The committee's findings on all changes are then published and distributed to the members.

The Congress considers these proposals once again at a hearing held during the annual convention. The arguments for and against the changes are repeated for the members attending this second hearing. These members then vote to sustain or overturn the revision committee's recommendation. The members can overturn the revision committee's decision with a three-fourths majority vote. After this hearing, the findings are mailed in the form of a confirmatory ballot to all the building official members of SBCC. If a majority of the returned ballots favors the change, the new provision becomes part of the code.

Many useful changes have been brought about by this process. One example that comes to mind is the code's provision governing roofing aggregate. Several years ago, this section stated that "lime rock was not an acceptable roofing material." A proposal was submitted to the Congress to omit this wording, and because the change was judged valid and no one opposed it, it was adopted.

Scope of codes has broadened

The ability to respond and adapt to construction industry changes has allowed building codes to become relevant and useful documents. Originally, the roofing codes were not very broad in scope. It has only been in the past 10 to 15 years that these codes have been used to regulate applications. This development has been brought about by changes in the way codes are promulgated. Prior to 1940, most building codes were written by insurance companies, whose main concern was fire spread. Around 1940, building officials began to write their own codes, and they expanded these documents to cover more than just health and life safety issues.

The three model codes that have evolved over the last 40 years are very similar. Basically, each has adopted the tests performed by recognized testing agencies to determine the acceptable performance of roofing products. For instance, code administrators have accepted Underwriters Laboratories and Factory Mutual tests for fire and wind on the new systems. Based on these tests, the local codes have established fire and wind uplift requirements for their areas.

Most of the model codes have adopted roofing material standards that represent a minimum level of acceptability. These standards, to some extent, restrict applications to those that are recommended by the Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association or individual manufacturers.

Often, new products are developed that are not adequately addressed in the current codes. Such new products are added to the codes through a strict review process. The manufacturers of these products must submit data and test results to prove the products' capabilities in a roofing installation. Before it will accept a new product, the SBCC requires its compliance committee to prepare a report on the material based on engineering and test data from various acceptable laboratories. This compliance report states the product's limitations and restrictions as well as the types of applications for which the product may be used.

This acceptance process is being used ex-

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tensively by manufacturers of single-ply, modifieds and liquid-applied roof systems. The building codes are not yet specific enough to establish requirements for these products. Because the innovative materials introduce completely new definitions of roof performance, it has been necessary for the code-making bodies to require more extensive testing before accepting the newer products.

Don't expect too much

Just as you must learn to use codes to your advantage, you must also learn not to expect too much of the regulations. Codes do not offer the complete answer to good roofing. In reality they are just one of the steps to better roof applications. With the code and permit process, we are asking building departments to help us clean up the roofing industry. But, realizing that we have not been able to accomplish this ourselves, we should not expect the building officials to be able to bring about sweeping reforms either.

This does not mean that codes and building permits are useless. If the quality of roofing being performed in your area can be improved through the intervention of code administrators and a small permit fee, then the time and energy you spend strengthening your local code will have been worth it. When a bad roof is applied or when an own-

er finds that a product will not cure all his water problems as promised, it reflects poorly on all of us in the roofing business.

It is time that more industry people, with or without a vested interest, became more involved in the code-making process. If the professionals in our industry don't get involved, less qualified people will. Contractors must take the time to learn what is already in place and work to improve it. Improving roofing codes and educating inspectors are only small steps in the right direction, however. The performance codes we have now are better than nothing and will give contractors a starting point, but contractors must begin to insist on specification-type codes that describe the proper methods of application.

Yes, building codes and building officials may look like government intrusion into your business. However, if you are practicing good roofing, similar to what is found in NRCA's *Roofing and Waterproofing Manual*, you will find yourself, with rare exception, complying with your local roofing code. Perhaps these codes and regulations will seem less offensive if you remember that they do require your competition to use the same specifications and be subject to the same governmental interventions.