

Relevance of Standards in Code Enforcement



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Model building codes consist of a set of regulations created for the purposes of adoption and enforcement through the appropriate local or state legislative and administrative processes. They provide reasonable and enforceable building regulations for protection of the public health, safety, and welfare in the built environment. They establish minimum quality and performance criteria for the methods and materials regulated by the code and set forth the provisions for administration and enforcement. Codes cannot readily address in detail every specialty area of construction methods and materials, so they address a multiplicity of authoritative resources on a subject, some of which are standards.

Standards supplement the code by setting forth conditions or requirements that a method, product, or material must meet, thereby providing an acceptable level of safety for building occupants. A standard addresses discrete aspects of a specific construction activity, whereas a code addresses the “big picture”.

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Standards carry an expectation of being as clear, direct, and enforceable as code requirements that are primary text. If the code is silent on a particular issue, then the provisions in the standard are applicable to the prescribed extent of the reference to that standard. A standard is not intended to be used as primary law but as a referenced authoritative resource.

Users of the codes, and therefore users of the standards referenced therein, can benefit greatly from the years of technical research that go into the development of standards, as they alleviate the need to acquire the same knowledge through time-consuming research or studying, or expensive consultation.

Standards and the New U.S. Model Codes from ICC

The International Code Council (ICC) was founded in 1994 by the Building Officials Code Administrators (BOCA), the International Conference of Building Officials (ICBO), and the Southern Building Code Congress International (SBCCI), and was given a clear mandate to provide a better alternative to the nation’s regionally based regulatory systems by developing a single, cohesive set of model building codes. The International Codes, or I-Codes as they are often called, represent over 200 years of combined experience on the part of the three model code groups listed above.

The model codes have always relied heavily on the use of referenced standards. The I-Code family’s reliance on standards has increased more than tenfold.

The importance of voluntary consensus standards cannot be understated.

The importance of standards is too often overlooked by users of building codes. It is critical to bear in mind that the codes typically contain a provision that mandates simultaneous adoption of a series of applicable referenced standards. Section 102.4 of the 2006 International Building Code (IBC), for example, states that “codes and standards referenced in this code shall be considered part of the requirements of this code to the prescribed extent of each such reference”.

Standards 101

What Is a Standard?

A standard is a published technical document providing a common reference that facilitates the flow of goods and services between buyers and sellers. It represents an industry consensus on how a material, product, or assembly is to be designed, manufactured, tested, or installed so that a specific level of performance is obtained. Consensus national standards within the construction process provide clear and detailed enforceable rules for specialty areas.

Types of Standards Referenced within the Model Building Codes

Standard Type	Description	Standard	Code & Section Number
Materials	Address product quality characteristics such as composition, dimensions, and uniformity.	ASTM C 315-20022; Specification for Clay Flue Linings	IFGC – Section 501.12
Design & Engineering	Include basic design procedures and engineering formulas. Describe methods of testing that determine the physical, functional, or performance characteristics of specific materials or products.	ASHRAE 15-2001 Safety Code for Mechanical Refrigeration	IMC – Section 1101.6
Installation	Govern the installation of specific products or a system.	NFPA 13-2002; Installation of Sprinkler Systems	IFC – Section 903.3.1.1
Testing	Identify methods and procedures for evaluating structural strength, fire resistance, and other performance criteria.	ASSE 1012-2002; Performance Requirements for Backflow Preventers with Intermediate Atmospheric Vent	IPC – Section 608.13.3

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