



## ***GUEST EDITORIAL***

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### **Building safety codes save lives**

From the time you are born until the day you die, how much time do you spend inside some type of a building? I am not sure that anyone has ever researched that, but I do know that most of us take it for granted that when we are in our home, a workplace, a school, an office building or a public facility that the structure is safe. We don't expect the ceiling to collapse. We don't think about the danger of fire or electrocution when a light switch is turned on. We assume the plumbing works properly and is not a health hazard. We expect heating, air conditioning and other mechanical systems to operate safely and energy efficiently.

But safe buildings don't happen by chance. America can boast it has the safest buildings in the world due largely to a cooperative effort. The partners in this effort are code officials who enforce building and fire safety codes; architects and engineers who design buildings to code; and contractors who build to code.

Building safety codes save lives and protect property investments. But too often the public sees building codes and the public officials who enforce them as regulators, not public safety officials like their colleagues in the fire service and police department. While building officials may not face the same on-the-job dangers as their counterparts in the fire service and police department, they do provide public safety.

Countless lives have been saved and property damage reduced by smoke detectors alerting residents to fires. Smoke detectors are required by building safety codes. Bedroom windows of sufficient size to allow residents to escape in emergencies and provide access to rescue personnel are another safety factor included in building codes. Stair guardrails provide a safety factor to protect children from getting their heads stuck between rails or falling through rails. Wind force resistance and seismic provisions in building codes are safeguards that protect people and property from natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes and earthquakes. And code officials are taking a lead role in green and sustainable construction, which is sweeping the country, to make sure green building is safe.

It is time to raise the profile of code officials so they get the recognition they deserve as guardians of public safety. The International Code Council has started a long-term campaign to change the way code

officials and building codes are perceived. The goal is to show that strong codes and effective enforcement are what make us less vulnerable to every kind of disaster, whether natural or human caused. In addition to lives saved, we know that each dollar spent on mitigation saves on average four to seven dollars in recovery costs.

When we do our jobs nothing happens. This statement best describes the need to be proactive in our roles as public safety officials. It is the awesome commitment by all code officials, design professionals and builders with whom we work to make the public safe in the thousands of buildings where we spend most of our lives.

The recognition of all code officials as public safety officials and defenders of the public from serious property loss and personal injury is an effort that is well past its due. Please join with me in our efforts to congratulate and recognize code officials for the job they do every day to make sure nothing happens.

—Wally Bailey, President, International Code Council 2006/2007,  
Director, Development and Construction, City of Fort Smith, Arkansas.

*The International Code Council, a membership association dedicated to building safety and fire prevention, develops the codes used to construct residential and commercial buildings, including homes and schools. Most U.S. cities, counties and states that adopt codes choose the International Codes developed by the International Code Council.*