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COUNCIL®

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Careers in Code Enforcement

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Careers in Code Enforcement

Code officials, inspectors, and plan reviewers play a major role in keeping the public safe. They ensure that all buildings, including homes, businesses, and places of public assembly, are built to required building safety codes, which address structural stability, fire safety, exits, sanitation, electricity, energy efficiency, and more. These Building Department staff are responsible for protecting the public health, safety, and welfare through effective code enforcement.

CODE ENFORCEMENT PROCESS

After a property owner submits an application for permission to construct or remodel a building, plan reviewers check the construction plans for code compliance. The code official grants a permit so construction can begin. Inspectors visit the site during different construction phases to determine the structure is built safely and according to plan. If something does not comply, the code official issues orders to have the builder correct the problem. When the project is complete, the inspector issues a certificate of occupancy.

Employment opportunities are available in governmental agencies and the private sector. Many states, county townships, and local communities have fully staffed offices, with a code official, plan reviewers and inspectors that are responsible for all construction in their jurisdiction.

Code enforcement professionals also work for architectural and engineering firms and private inspection agencies that consult for jurisdictions and design firms. Many companies have plan review departments to evaluate projects from the conceptual phase through final, ready-for-construction documents, and inspectors to ensure projects are in compliance.

CODE OFFICIALS

The code official is the executive official in charge of the Building Department. He or she maintains all records pertaining to permit applications, permits, inspections, notices, fees paid, and orders issued. This documentation provides a valuable resource if questions arise. The code official also helps designers and builders with code interpretations, explains minimum requirements, answers questions, and investigates and resolves complaints involving existing buildings and sites.

In small communities and rural areas, a single code official may be responsible for building, plumbing, fire prevention, mechanical and electrical inspections, as well as building and zoning administration duties. In larger metropolitan areas, these tasks may be performed by specialized staff.

PLAN REVIEWERS

Plan reviewers, or examiners, evaluate the project's construction documents, including architectural, structural, site plan, mechanical, plumbing, electrical, and fire protection drawings, as well as the corresponding specifications, structural design calculations, and soil reports. They examine items for code compliance, cite deficiencies and request revisions on the construction documents to resolve any problems. A plan reviewer must have working knowledge of code requirements, expertise in reading drawings for basic construction techniques, and understand engineering and architectural definitions and symbols. A background in architecture or engineering is beneficial.



INSPECTORS

Inspectors usually specialize in one area of construction: building, public works, electrical, mechanical, plumbing, housing, or fire prevention. All inspectors apply the principles and methods of construction to judge work and decide whether it complies with applicable standards or codes. Throughout a construction project, they make preliminary inspections, check that materials meet specifications, and perform follow-up inspections to ensure compliance with regulations. Several inspectors may work on one project.

TYPES OF INSPECTORS

- **BUILDING INSPECTORS** review project drawings and specifications. They visit the building site to check drainage, elevations, and placement of the building on the plot. They examine floor framing, wall framing, roofs, ceilings, chimneys, and all other parts of the building structure. An inspection is required at the completion of each building phase before work can progress. When the building is completed, the building inspector performs a comprehensive inspection, then issues a certificate of occupancy.
- **PUBLIC WORKS INSPECTORS** are responsible for checking government projects such as airports, highways, water and sewer systems, streets, bridges, and dams. They inspect digging and fill operations and placement of forms for concrete. They observe concrete mixing and pouring, asphalt paving and grading operations, and keep records of all performed work and materials used. Public works inspectors may have a specialty, such as reinforced concrete, dredging, or ditches.
- **ELECTRICAL INSPECTORS** check the quality of materials, installation work, and safeguards for electrical systems. They make sure electrical systems meet applicable city, state, and national codes, and electrical codes and standards. Electrical inspectors inspect new wiring and fixtures in businesses, public buildings, and homes.
- **MECHANICAL INSPECTORS** focus on heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning concerns. They inspect mechanical appliances and equipment; air distribution systems; kitchen exhaust equipment; boilers and water heaters; hydronic piping; gas piping systems; flammable and combustible liquid storage and piping systems; fireplaces, chimneys, and vents; refrigeration systems; and incinerators and crematories. Mechanical inspectors also check air quality and energy conservation measures.
- **PLUMBING INSPECTORS** check for proper design and installation of plumbing systems, including sanitary and storm drainage systems, sanitary facilities, water supplies, and storm water and sewage disposal in buildings.
- **FIRE INSPECTORS** examine nonresidential buildings annually to ensure that appropriate fire safety practices are being followed. Fire inspections are usually performed by the local fire department or fire prevention bureau.
- **PROPERTY MAINTENANCE OR HOUSING INSPECTORS** inspect existing buildings for health or safety violations and the condition of the exterior property.



WORKING CONDITIONS AND HOURS

On construction sites, inspectors may work out of a field office where they read blueprints, review correspondence, write reports, or schedule inspections. The rest of their time is spent inspecting construction sites, which may be dirty and cluttered with tools, materials, vehicles, or debris. Inspectors typically work a 40-hour week, but overtime may also be required seasonally or to meet a deadline.

Earnings in the construction industry are higher than those in most other industries. Construction workers in and around large cities typically make higher wages than workers in rural areas. Inspectors earn a yearly salary based on experience, education, location, and actual job requirements ranging from \$25,850 to \$97,000. Benefits include paid vacations and holidays, sick leave, medical and life insurance, and some form of retirement or pension program.

EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATION

A high-school diploma or the equivalent is the minimum requirement. Many employers require inspectors to have worked in the construction trades, completed an apprenticeship program, studied engineering or architecture for at least two years, or have an Associate's degree from a community college with courses in construction technology, blueprint reading, mathematics, building inspection, or public administration.

Many jurisdictions now require a Bachelor's or Master's degree in addition to on-site experience. Bachelor's degrees are available in construction, fire protection management, engineering, architecture, and related fields. Many jurisdictions require additional certification and continuing education for their building officials and inspectors. Certification for building official, plan review, and inspection disciplines are available.

For more certification information visit the [ICC Assessment Center](http://www.iccsafe.org).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT

Certification enhances the chances for higher paying, more responsible jobs. From there, inspectors may progress to management work. Those entering this field with an Associate's or Bachelor's degree can advance by furthering their education in related fields such as public administration.

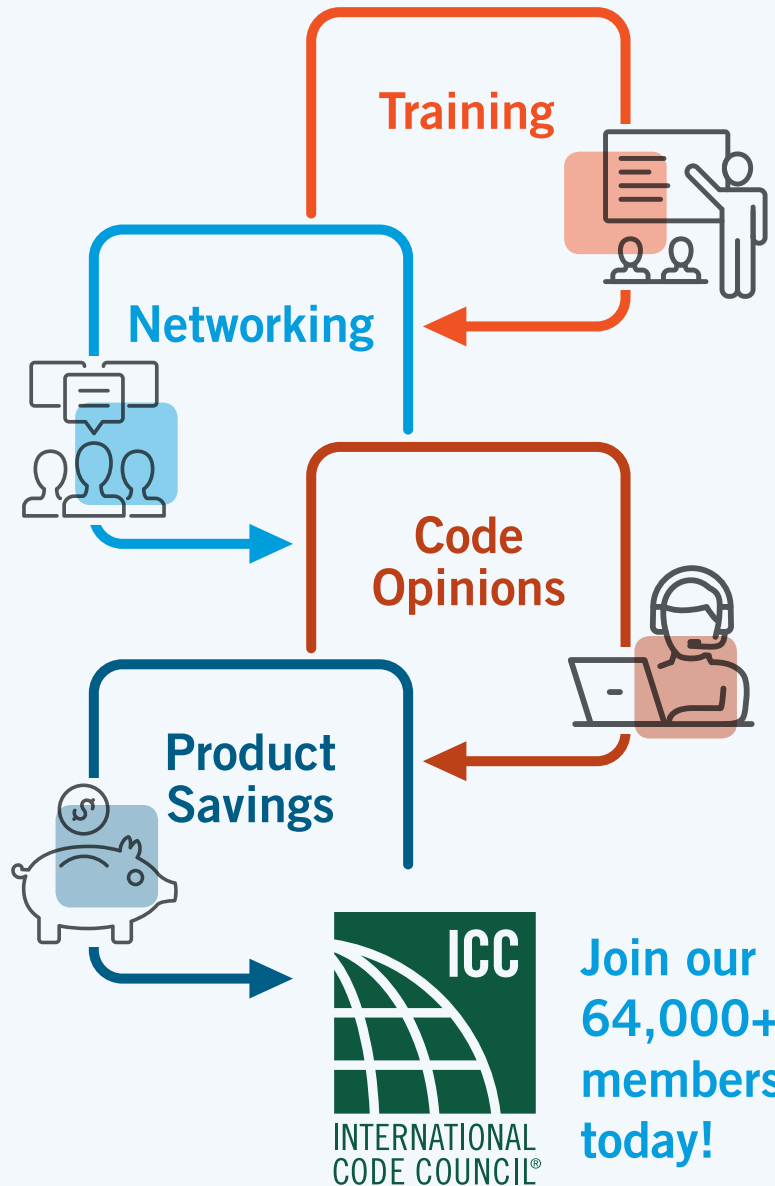
FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about careers in code enforcement you may wish to contact city, county, state, or federal government agencies; any state or federal Department of Labor; or libraries for more specific information on job opportunities and employment requirements in the code enforcement field. You may also contact local colleges and/or universities to inquire about degree programs related to code enforcement.



ICC Membership

An Essential Tool to advance your Building Safety Career!



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