



# COCO

## North Carolina Council of Code Officials

### When an Inspector does his job...Nothing Happens!

*Dan Dockery*

*Building Inspector, NCBA and ICC Member and a part of your Team*

In almost 15 years of being a Building Inspector I had never heard that slogan until the 2014 Quadrennial COCO Convention. I was floored, but it's the truth. Our profession labors in silence most of the time; we operate under the radar, seeming to prefer getting out and doing our jobs with little notice and absolutely no fanfare. Being unknown heroes, protecting the safety, health and welfare of the public in the live, work and play environment. That's all good, but what has it done for us as a professional workforce. I'm not asking what it has done for our communities or what kind of positive influence we have had on the economic drivers of North Carolina. I'm not asking if our communities are safer, if our family's futures are more secure or if we make our City's more attractive to business and community development. I'm asking what we have done for ourselves as a professional workforce.

I saw an interesting picture of firefighters responding to a blaze at a commercial building... it was a "shout out" to the value of First Responders. I like the term first responders, but it is way too limiting. Those safety-minded public servants in that photo were also part of a team that should be called "First Preventers". I'll bet they had a hand in trying to ensure the safety of that structure through plans review and inspections earlier in its life. So not only were they or their team "First Preventers", they were also "First Responders", and guess what, it's very possible they were the "Last Responders" on that call also. I'm using this to again illustrate a point; our Building and Fire professionals in the State of North Carolina are very good at what we do. We're conscientious, we're thorough, we're responsible, we're responsive, we're caring, we're... I could go on all day. We are there at the beginning of a project, we're there in the middle, and sometimes, yes, we're there at the end. What we are not, are effective Public Relations people.

I don't expect us to become publicity hounds and I don't expect us to become outgoing; and I doubt we will ever make an effort to find the spotlight. But what I do want us to do is promote ourselves as professionals in the building safety workplace. Our acceptance of our own importance in ensuring a safe live, work, play environment

promotes an atmosphere that creates security for our jobs as public employees and jurisdictional (non-third party) experts. And yes, I believe that the most important voice in building safety is that jurisdictional expert. We have no motive except one... safety, and we have no goal except one...professional performance in our duty. There is no other body of people who can speak as authoritatively and realistically to safety in the live, work and play environment, and to responsible code development, than the Code Official and his/her support organizations. For that reason we should look to one another for support in changing the profile and perception of Code Officials statewide.

We should start by looking at our own demographics. The typical code official is between the ages of 55 and 64, he/she serves in a department of up to 9 (nine) people in a jurisdiction of 75,000 or less. He or she has 26 to 35 years of experience in the combined trades and inspections professions, (usually with 5-15 years as a code professional). Twenty-five percent have sought higher education after high school. He or she may serve as an inspector, a plans reviewer, a department manager, or maybe even all three positions. Thirty-one percent of those CEO's will leave the profession within 5 years, and 82% will retire within the next fifteen years. The impact of the loss of community or institutional knowledge and code enforcement capacity will be crippling to our profession. And less than 15% of the applicants for the jobs created by retirements in our profession are under the age of 45. We have a serious problem facing us, and I truly believe that a good way to start correcting the problem of loss in effectiveness, efficiency, knowledge and capacity in our departments is to start trying to "Raise the Profile" of our jobs, our employee team members, our support organizations and to put a "Face" on the profession of Code Development and Code Enforcement.

That face is yours; look around in your communities at the successes you share with your partners in the building, design, inspections profession. Look at the happy kids running in and out of your school buildings, the joy of the church-goer after Sunday Service, the relaxed sigh on the face of a husband or wife as they see their own front door after a hard day at work... you helped put that expression there because through your efforts they can feel more safe in the places that shelter, inspire and comfort them. Their face is now

your face, and it's the face of a professional code official. The profile of a community that shares a productive, safe and engaged live, work and play environment is your profile. That is the profile we want to raise. And we don't want to raise the profile because we are seeking glory for ourselves; what we seek for ourselves is the satisfaction of knowing we belong to a profession that has decent pay, reasonable security, and a reputation for service that attracts qualified applicants who want to be contributors to their fellow citizens, and through that we ensure the safety and well-being of ourselves and others for generations to come.

I do want us to "Raise the Profile", and I promise to help bring more ideas to a forum that can be shared by the Council of Code Officials about how to combine our efforts. But we need your help, we need your ideas, we need your input, we need your community stories, we need your successes and your failures, but mostly we need your profile. We have associations and institutions that labor continuously on our behalf, and we need to embrace them as partners.

We have organizations that do business in our communities that we seldom talk to whose livelihoods depend on our professional response. We have jurisdictional teams' side-by-side who ignore one another's efforts to promote consistency and fair enforcement. And even though we're not perfect, we're still very good. Well, if you're good, then you want to get better, you want to "Raise the Profile". I want to be there with you... we want to be there with you. COCO, DOI/OSFM, ICC, NCBA, NCMIA, NCPIA, IAEI, BCC, NCFMA... are there waiting for you, the individual code enforcement official to be everything you can be, our communities are waiting for our response, our families and friends are waiting for our efforts, and our "Profile" is waiting to be elevated to its rightful place in the live, work and play environment. We want to hear from you, the members of the North Carolina Inspections Team, let's "Raise the Profile", let's guarantee the safety of our futures through promoting our own professional behavior, and let's work to ensure our future through attracting new, intelligent and civic minded partners to the profession of Code Enforcement Official.



## News from the NC Fire Marshal's Association

The North Carolina Fire Marshal's Association (NCFMA) held its 3rd quarter meeting on July 23, 2014 at the Raleigh Convention Center. This meeting was in conjunction with the NC State Fireman's Association SAFRE conference. Approximately 90 people were in attendance.

NCFMA is offering its fall 2014 continuing education workshops. Richard Strickland, Chief Fire Code Consultant with OSFM will teach a six hour class on CO alarm and detection systems. Much of the class will focus on recent legislation and code changes affecting carbon monoxide alarms. Building and/or fire continuing

education credit will be given. Classes will be held in Durham (Nov. 6), Rocky Mount (Nov. 12), Conover (Nov. 25) and Asheville (Dec. 3).

For the first time in several years NCFMA will be charging a \$20.00 registration fee for its workshops beginning in the fall of 2014. One hundred percent of the receipts will be used to fund NCFMA scholarships. Go to [NCFMA.com](http://NCFMA.com) for additional information including the registration form.

Our next meeting will be held in Greensboro, NC at the Guilford Co. Emergency Services Building, 1002 Meadowwood Rd., Greensboro, NC, 2014 at 1:00 P.M. Please check our website for additional information.