

# BOAT Bulletin

A publication by the  
Building Officials  
Association of Texas.  
Building A Stronger Texas.

March, 2012



## Mark Your Calendar

- April 18-19 Code Enforcement Training, Property Maintenance Standards, Pasadena
- April 29-May 8 ICC Code Hearings, Dallas
- May 21-25 Building Professional Institute, Arlington
- August 7-10 BOAT Annual Fall Conference, San Antonio
- October 21-24 ICC Annual Conference and Group A Final Action Hearings, Portland, Oregon

## President's Message



The Code Hearings were held at the end of October this year in Phoenix. At these hearings, ICC designated this upcoming year as the "Year of the Member." I kind of liked that idea. Let's call our upcoming year the "Year of the Chapter."

In August 2012, we are having the Building Official Association of Texas's annual meeting, and I want to encourage all of you to attend. We had 300-plus attendees in Irving this past August, and it was a great success. Beautiful San Antonio will be the meeting site this August, so come one, come all. We plan to have great training and fun fellowship. While there, I would like to propose that we have our First Annual Chapter Presidents' Meeting. For this meeting, please be prepared to discuss everything



## Customer Service

We cannot underestimate the value of good customer service training. There is always room for improvement.



Congratulations  
to  
Scott McDonald

2012 CRC  
Building Official  
of the Year



## Continued

from your needs and wants to ideas on future chapter building. I believe this can be the beginning of something great!

Our Houston Building Professional Institute was a great success, as well. Our thanks go out to Charles Clawson and Dr. Mathis, along with Paul Ward, for all you do. Also, thank you to our host, the City of Houston, and the Bay Area Moderator for making the Houston BPI such a special event. While at our Board meeting there, I asked John Brown, the secretary of BOAT, to head a committee to help grow the Houston BPI by at least 200 attendees next year. If you have ideas and/or are willing to help, please contact John. Also, as part of the attempt to promote the growth of BPI, I have asked our vice president, Kurt Kasson, to do the same for Arlington. There are still plans in the works to start a third BPI in the Austin/San Antonio area, as well. More information is to come on that.

Mark your calendars for the Code Hearings at the Sheraton Dallas Hotel beginning April 29-May 6. The IBC, IFGC, IMC, IPC, and IPSDC will all be on the agenda. What a great opportunity to get some continuing education units and learn how the codes are adopted! These hearings will be held in Texas and are free, so please come out and help us represent our state. We have a unique opportunity to affect the code in a very positive way, but we have to be there to do it.

Last, but most importantly, with the tragic accident that claimed the life of Bryce Contreras, I am reminded that though we are all busy, each of us needs to take time out for our family and friends. Bryce's dad Greg is a great friend and contributor to BPI, and all of us at BOAT want to send our deepest sympathies out to his beautiful family.

- Lawrence Crow

## Raise the profile

We all have heard this term or motto being used for a while now. I truly believe in its concept and have done what I can to live it and promote it. This will be a short article in words but large in scope. It has only one question I need you to think about, and then send me an e-mail with your thoughts. It won't be an open forum for back-and-forth discussions; however, I am curious what you think.

The question is:

Do you think it is time for all city inspectors in the State of Texas—building, electrical, mechanical, and fire—to be “required” to hold a certification from an approved code organization in the field they perform inspections?

I agree that it is not a simple answer, but I feel it is time the question was asked and discussed. Raise the Profile? I think so.

- John R. Brown, CBO,  
West University Place



## Changes at Development Services Department - Corpus Christi

Customer focused, no matter how large or small a project

In 2005, the department underwent significant organizational mapping with the assistance of an outside consultant to create a project management approach and improved customer service focused on transparency, accountability, and consistency. Since that time, several technological improvements, streamlined business processes, and improved response times have created an atmosphere where large projects can thrive and succeed. A good portion of that success can be attributed to the Early Assistance approach that is provided by the department at no cost.

While we have improved our assistance and turnaround times of larger projects, we have work to do on our improved outreach and assistance to smaller projects, typically those of small businesses that have a direct impact to the local economy. To that end, we are creating a strategic marketing and educational outreach program that will focus on small business and homeowner projects that are typically on very tight budgetary constraints.

We are seeking to turn the traditional hierarchical

organization on its head and create a team approach we believe will empower the staff and allow them to be partners in the success of the organization, as opposed to watching on the sidelines.

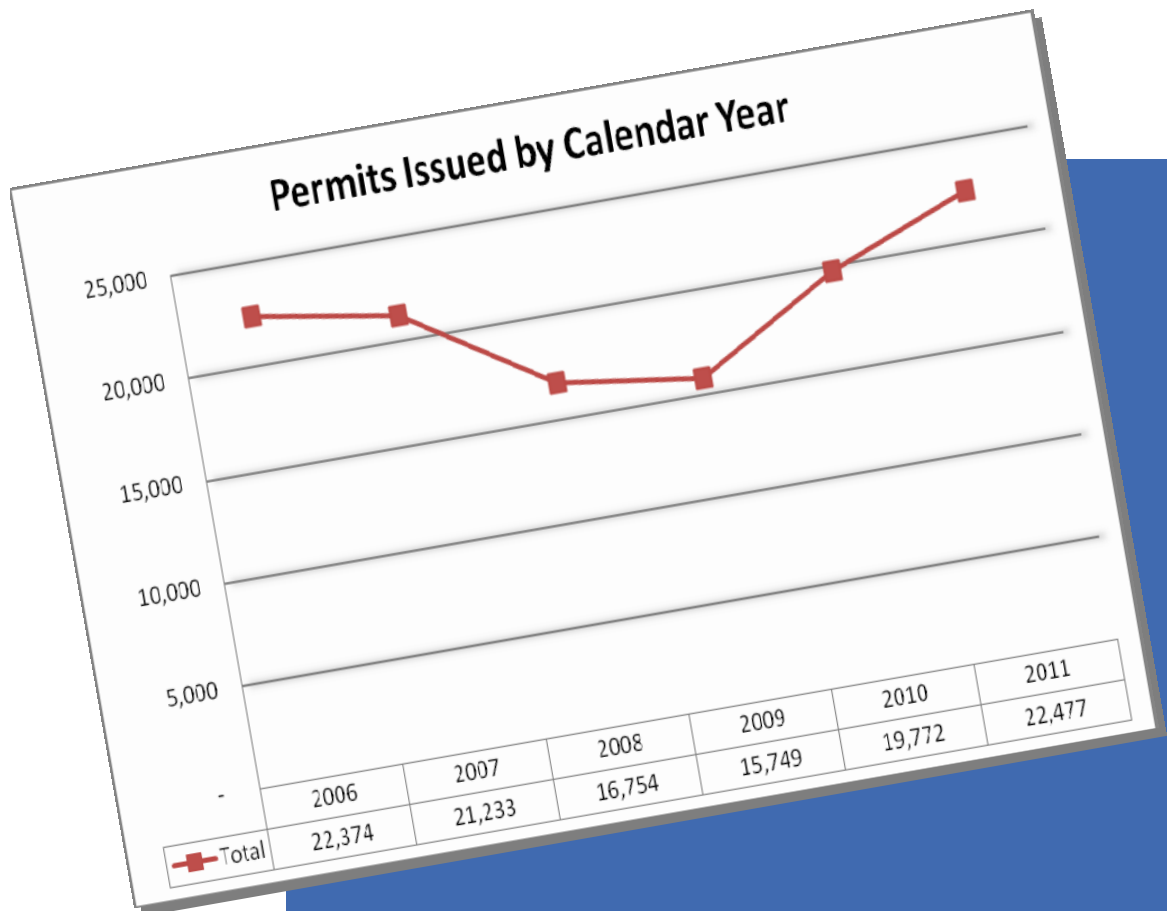
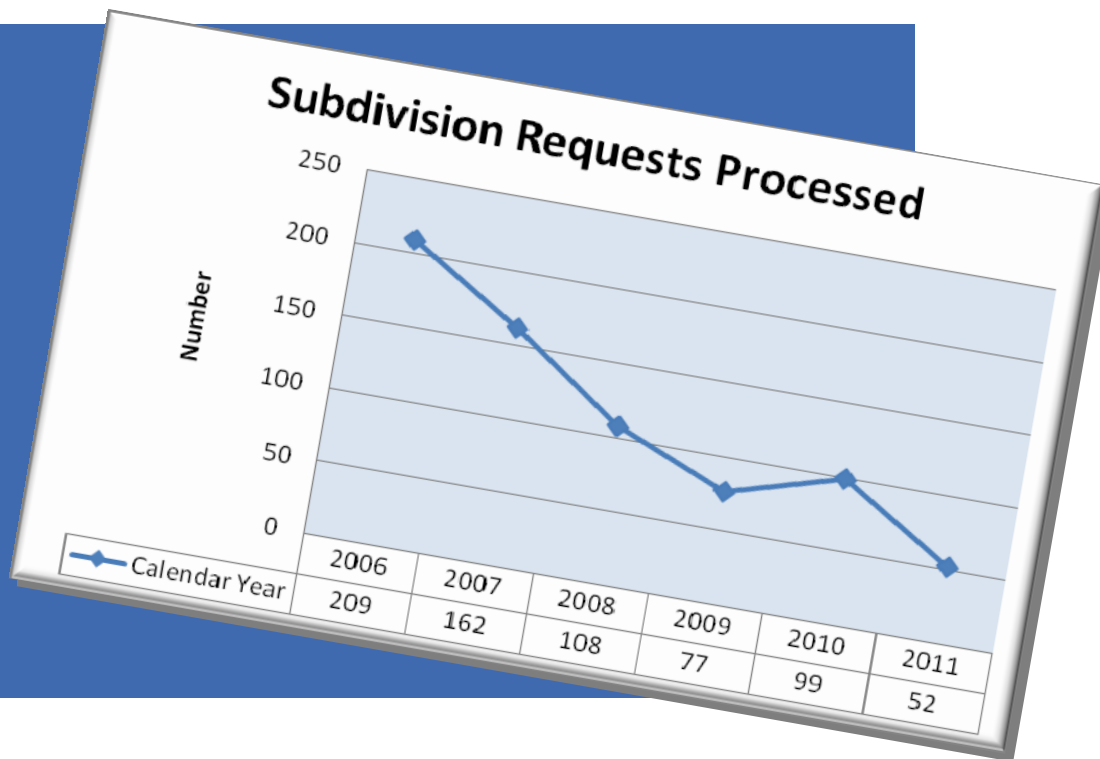
Other current programs in progress include:

- An improved Web presence, allowing for more online submittals, review, and payment
- A “Fellowship” program, which seeks to build partnerships with the local colleges and universities and keep local students employed and active in the leadership of Corpus Christi
- Early Assistance programs aimed at providing detailed information to customers prior to any significant investment on their part and increasing their chances of project success
- Improved marketing and education efforts targeting homeowners and small businesses
- Third-party contracts

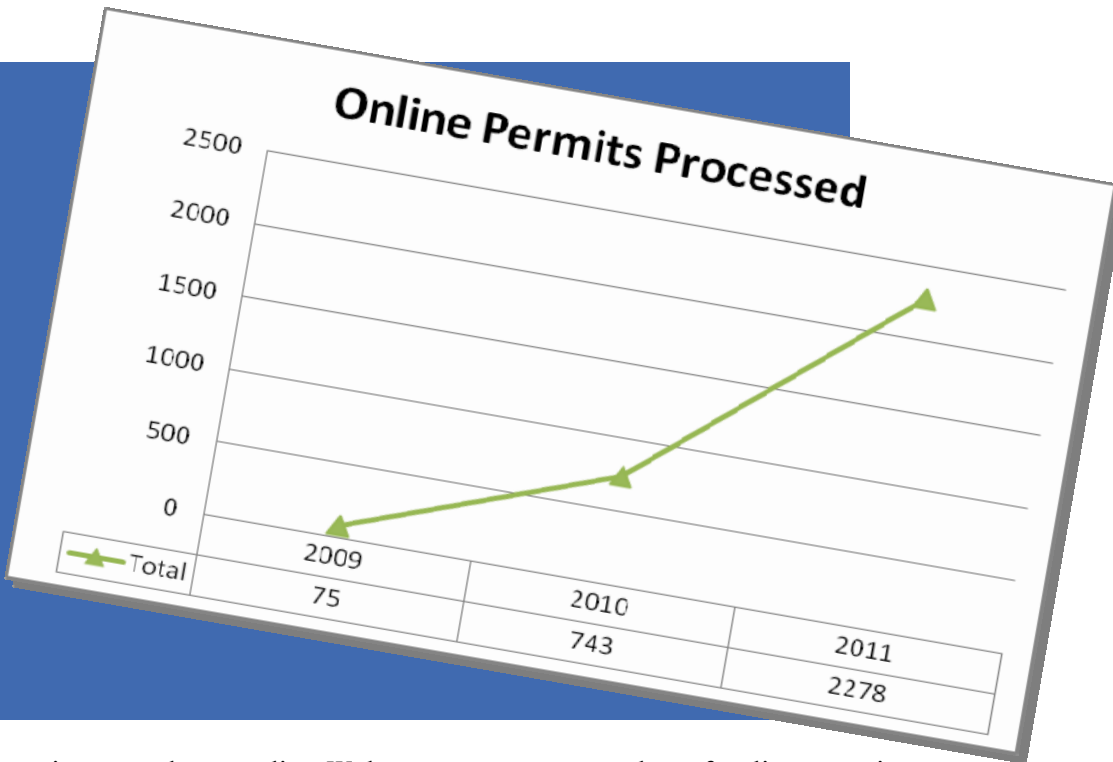
in place to subsidize staff and assist with high priority or highly complex projects

The current business environment in the Coastal Bend area is somewhat insulated from the country’s economic crisis, in that we have several key employment sectors—such as energy, health, and defense—that have remained steady. The goal is to improve the development process so that we are able to effectively capitalize on the growth and expansion of those industries, since they attract jobs that will be required to be served by residential and commercial components.

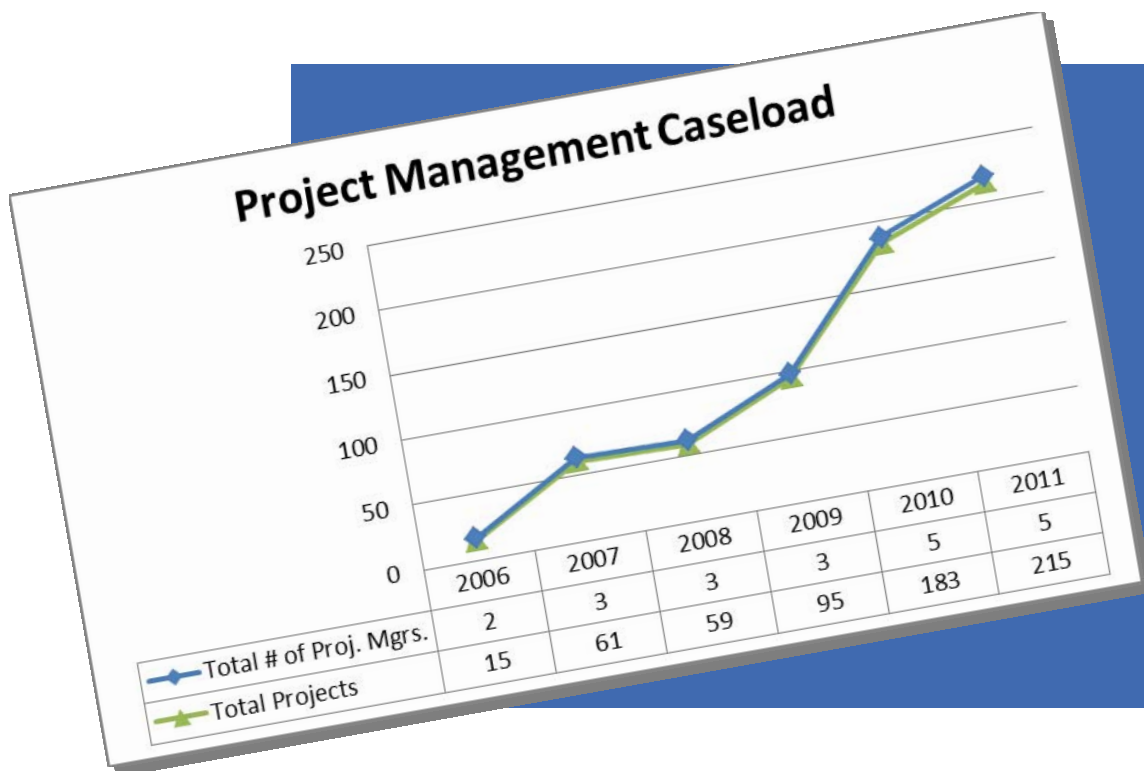
Current statistics for the business environment are summarized below. The current business activity shows a decline in the number of subdivision requests processed; however, permit activity and permit revenue continue a slow but steady increase. This indicates that the subdivision requests processed in 2006 and 2007 are now coming to fruition and vertical construction has begun.



The number of permits has increased as we streamline our work processes and ensure the customer's entire project is addressed and all of the appropriate permits are in place at the commencement of the job.

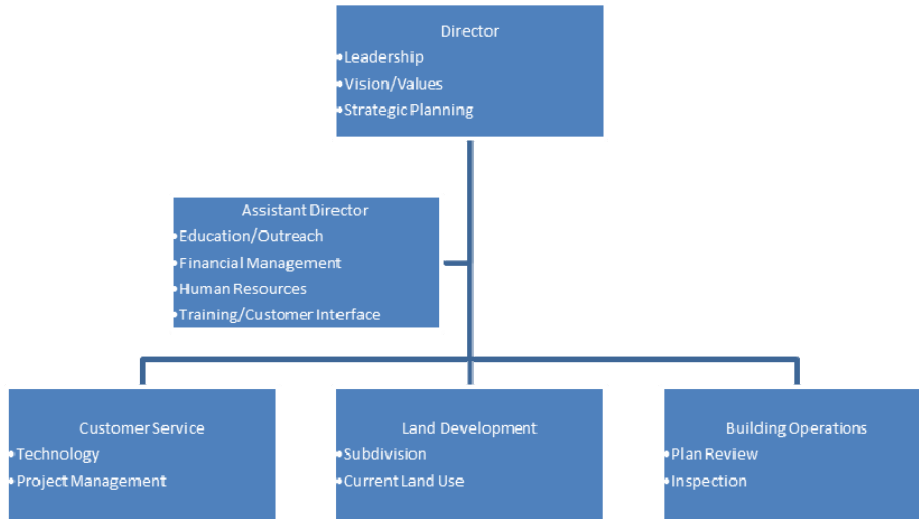


As we have increased our online Web presence, our number of online permits processed has increased exponentially.

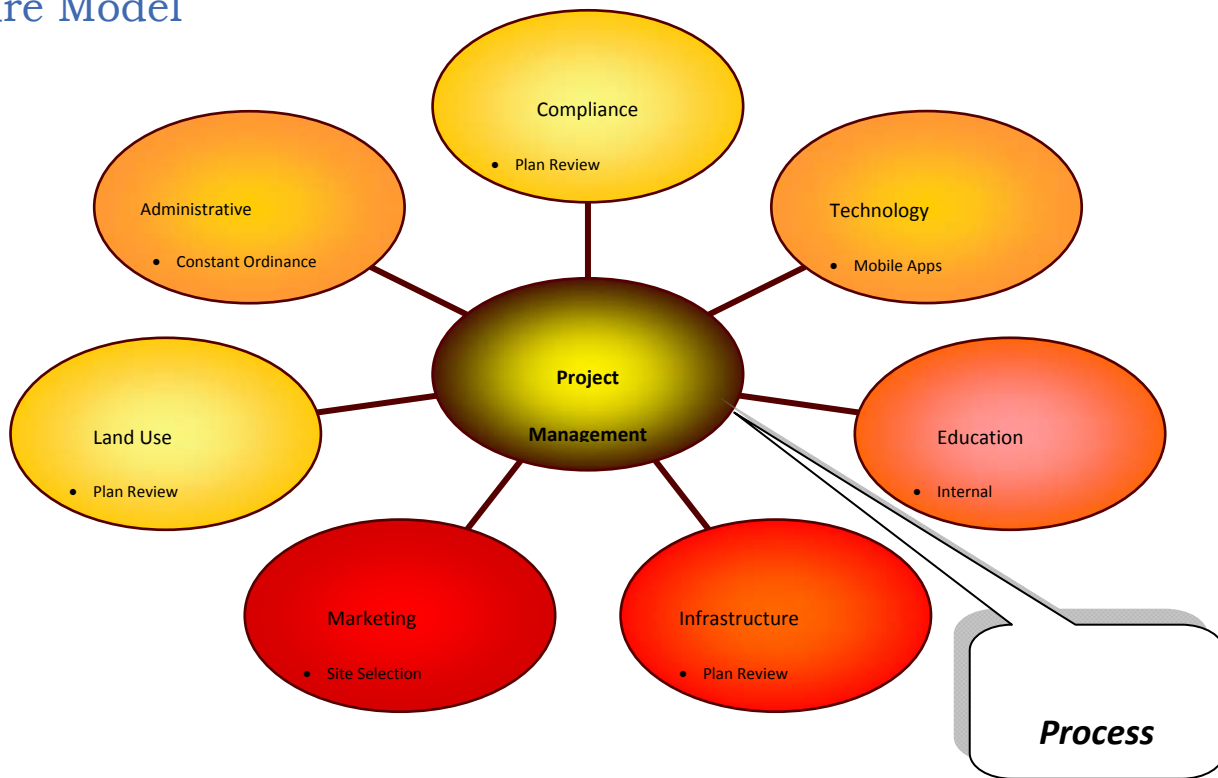


The graphical number does not represent the number of issue resolution cases that are handled by the project management staff on a daily basis in order to keep a customer's project on task.

# Current Organizational Structure



# Future Model



## Continued

The Development Services Department is the city's one-stop shop for permitting and land development assistance. The department is currently in a renaissance, transforming from a regulator to a facilitator and becoming a division of Business Support Services.

As a division of Business Support Services, several mission elements of the department were revised to more closely align with the city's efforts to encourage and facilitate development throughout the community. Mission elements will now focus on delivering fair and collaborative solutions to development issues, a reliable inspection and plan review process, as well as a sustainable land development process.

In order to accomplish that mission, we must address inter-agency collaboration, with an

emphasis on outcomes, not recognition; market awareness and educational outreach; and manage our resources with innovative and shared resource plans. Most importantly, we must invent a new departmental culture based on team concepts and also reinvent the public image of the department.

The department faces several key issues that must be addressed in order to move forward and complete the transformation; specifically, transforming the internal department culture from one of complacency and regulator mentality to one of a collaborative, consistent, and mission-driven work environment. Most importantly, we must communicate the vision of the organization into the core value set of each employee. To this end, we are turning the hierarchical organization on its head and creating a team environment that will foster innovation, growth, buy-in, trust, and

accountability to our peers. We must empower our employees to do the "right thing" and trust that when given the tools, they will do just that.

In the team concept, the project manager is the business or work process owner. As the process "owner," the project manager is responsible for ensuring that all pieces of the development process are working together, and must bring to light any issues that are relevant to the current or future projects and address them within the organization. All members of the team are responsible for being solution-oriented and team players. This will bring the organization into a constant state of process improvement, and it can then become a dynamic force within the economic development community.

- Stephen Draper, Building Official, Corpus Christi

## Remote Voting

Earlier this year, the ICC Board of Directors appointed a committee to research, study, and recommend a course of action for "Remote Participation." Wait a minute...what is remote participation? Remote participation was the initial name for a project that would allow ICC voting members to participate in the code development process without having to actually be in attendance

at the code development hearings. As each of you think about this undertaking, I am sure a number of scenarios come to mind. Believe me when I say that it is even more cumbersome than you can imagine!

The impetus behind this effort comes from a mixture of ICC voting members who have a desire to participate but are unable to attend the hearings, ICC's desire to have more people

participate, and the desire of non-voting members to make the code development process fair and transparent. When you bundle these with a code development cycle that spans from a code change proposal, to committee hearings, to final action hearings for both A and B



## Continued

code cycles, you have some far-reaching decisions on how, when, and where to allow remote participation.

I am seeking anyone's opinions on how you think this should work. Please e-mail me at jim.olk@farmersbranch.info or call me at 972-919-2533 and give me your thoughts on this topic.

- Jim Olk, Building Official, Farmers Branch



## Forgiveness or Permission

I know everyone is familiar with the phrase, "It's easier to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission." Is it just Waco, or are other cities around the state seeing this become the rule and not the exception? I'm not sure if it's the economy/recession or if citizens, builders, contractors, and/or developers just don't want to follow the rules as they have been laid out. In times past, this would occur infrequently, but now it seems it's occurring weekly, if not several times a week. I'm not just talking about sheds, carports, other accessory buildings, etc., built without a permit, or built in a setback, easement, or the floodplain. I'm also talking about large residential and commercial projects.

One of the biggest problems we were facing was slabs not being grounded in accordance with the 2008 NEC, especially residential. We have heard the following: "I didn't know I needed an inspection"; or the electrician says, "I told

the concrete guy not to pour because I haven't received an inspection"; and the one I like the most is when the concrete guy tells the electrician that he is pouring right now, no matter what ("I don't care if you haven't received your inspection"). It hasn't always been like this, has it?

So, I guess one of the big questions is what enforcement action do you take? Here are some examples: issuing a ticket, filing a complaint, or both. And the one I like the least is, pass the project and denote in the permanent record that there was not an inspection conducted on A, B, C, etc. The last one is a real disservice to the citizen/ property owner. This must be documented, because many citizens will do open records request to see if the structure was inspected and if not, why. Now, if we made destructive inspections, the last option would not be utilized. We could have the builder/contractor bust up the slab to show us the grounding system; remove sheetrock to

show insulation, plumbing, mechanical and electrical (we require them to do some of this, but not much); etc. The problem is, that is not how the system is supposed to work. If you want to live in a country and do whatever you can get away with, maybe you don't need to live in a civilized country like the USA.

When you live in a city, there inherently comes with that the privilege and expectation that you will and should follow the rules, laws, codes, and ordinances that are in place. Can you see a city removing all traffic control devices and hoping and praying all the citizens don't kill themselves? That would most certainly lead to disaster. The codes and ordinances we enforce daily can have the same effect if permits are issued and inspections are not conducted and documented.

In closing, it seems to be a phenomenon that is gaining ground, even though the ground is shaky and undesirable.

- Randall R. Childers, CBO,  
Waco





# Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide Alarms: What's Required

New legislation effective  
September 1, 2011

For many years, the standard for installation of hardwired, interconnected smoke alarms has remained fairly consistent. There has been some confusion, particularly concerning existing buildings and when those provisions are required. To summarize the language: when a permit is required for construction, smoke alarms are required. This language has caused some debate. The intent of the code was for interior construction, primarily when a building permit is required.

- 2006 IRC contained revised language to clarify that smoke alarms are not required in existing dwellings where the work is limited to window or door replacement, or when an exterior porch or deck is constructed. This language expanded the previous editions, which referenced roofing and siding.
- 2009 IRC provides additional clarity for the installation, alteration, or repairs of plumbing or mechanical systems are exempt.
- 2009 IRC also added a new requirement for carbon monoxide alarms in new construction and in existing

dwellings where work requiring permit occurs and the dwelling contains fuel fire appliances and/or an attached garage. The single station alarms are to be located outside of each sleeping area in the immediate vicinity of such sleeping areas.

- 2012 IRC added language to specifically recognize wireless technology for interconnection of smoke alarms.

The Texas Legislature recently passed a new law that went into effect on September 1, 2011. This law, specifically addressing rental properties, requires compliance no later than January 1, 2013. This new law was enacted to help prevent municipalities from unfairly requiring owners of multi-family housing projects to install hardwired, interconnected smoke alarms without any triggering construction.

The amendments to the Texas Property Code Sections 92.006(a) and (b) state in part:

I. Smoke alarms powered by battery installed in compliance with subchapter and local ordinance before

September 1, 1987, may continue, and a local ordinance may not be required unless:

- a. Interior repair, remodeling, or rebuilding costs exceeds \$5000 and:
  - i. The repair, remodeling, or rebuilding requires municipal permit; AND
  - b. Either
    - i. The repair, remodeling, or rebuilding results in removal of interior walls or ceiling finishes exposing structure;
    - ii. The interior of the unit provides access for building wiring through an attic, crawl space, or basement without removal of interior finishes.
- c. An addition occurs to the unit at a cost exceeding \$5000

There are some exceptions to these provisions; however, this is the basis for the amendments. With respect to a dwelling unit first occupied or for which a certificate of occupancy was issued before September 1, 2011, a landlord shall comply with the change in law made by Section 92.255, Property Code, as amended by this Act, on or before January 1, 2013.

- Scott McDonald, CBO, Amarillo

## Customer Service

Recently, my supervisor had been encouraging me to provide customer service training for my building and code enforcement staff. When your supervisor is requesting improvements in customer service, it is usually due to complaints taken up to his level or above. My first thought was, "Management seems to look at what you're not doing instead of what you have been doing!" Nevertheless, my director reminded me that we cannot underestimate the value of good customer service training, and there is always room for improvement.

My mission now is to start everyone's training quickly. Therefore, I went to visit my human resources department to seek their recommendation for material on this subject. I was a little disappointed that they did not have any official, city-wide customer service training materials, and they directed me to the Texas Municipal League (TML) Web site for videos that we could check out. When discussing this mission with my supervisors, however, we discovered that our code enforcement division had purchased a video program last year titled *Exceptional Customer Service* by Fred Pyror Seminars. It seemed like a good idea to use this program, because it provided three videos that covered the "Essence of Customer Service," "Building Customer Goodwill and Trust," and "Turning around Angry Customers." The whole series was about two-and-a-half hours long, and it was decided to divide our staff

into two groups and show the video series in its entirety to each group.

To obtain best staff participation and maximum benefits, it was decided to ask each employee to bring paper and pen to take notes for positive feedback and to offer suggestions for customer service improvement. This could be related to their immediate job function, or for any function division-wide. After viewing the videos, everyone would have the opportunity to report back their top three suggestions for improvement. After watching the video, some employees were motivated and quick to make suggestions, and they even had trouble limiting their comments to three. The video series helped us realize that we had a lot of room for improvement—not only learning how to meet the customers' expectations as we normally try to do, but being willing to learn how to exceed our customers' needs. We now see the need to review our areas of customer contact and start developing training standards and create systems to make the changes take place. One quick idea we found that was easy to implement was to place smiley stickers on everyone's desk phone to remind us to smile when we pick up the phone. According to the training program, the requirement to smile when we answer the phone would be the standard, and the smiley sticker would be the system to ensure success. As we all know, it is the little things that can make the difference.



Permit clerks ready to help



Mickey says, "Smile while talking on the phone!"



Building inspector helping customer with a permit

## Continued

Also, we learned the importance of dealing with customers and their needs on an individual basis, rather than grouping them into the same commonly asked questions and answers. Another improvement was learning how to best deal with angry customers. In code enforcement work, we get our fair share of unhappy citizens. Learning to let them completely express (vent) their feelings, not take the situation personally, ignore unrealistic statements, acknowledge the customers' feelings, and stick to the facts was very helpful. The video stated that the real goal with angry customers is to rebuild their trust after the issue has been resolved.

What meant the most to me was my staff's desire to identify areas where they perceive customer service was lacking within our department and

be willing to make changes to improve. We are all public servants, and for the most part, we tend to believe we are giving good customer service. But, in truth, we sometimes let other items (like getting the job done) get in the way. I realize that it is up to the building official (supervisor) to lead and train staff to learn to provide exceptional customer service. I also realize that we have always spent our training dollars on our technical staff and have neglected our clerical staff. If putting our best face out front (permit clerk staff) is truly critical to how the citizens and contractors see us, proper training is a must.

In closing, we all know when we receive good customer service and when we do not. There are certain stores that I will not shop at due to their lack of good customer service,

and there are stores that I have gone out of my way to buy from because they treated me very well. Such places actually seem glad that I am at their store, and they want me to enjoy their product or services (for example, Starbucks). Some places "say" the right stuff, but you know it is just a script and does not have any meaning to it. You know when appreciation is real or not. Therefore, as we go forward, we all want to be the "real thing," and for us, we will start creating best Standards and Systems to move us from good customer service to providing exceptional customer service.

- Earl Abbott, Building  
Official, Killeen

## Quality Service Results in Good Public Relations

You and your employees are doing things every hour of the working day that affect the way people feel about your city. Your job is to see that the impressions made are good impressions—the kind that win friends and create public support for what you and your government are trying to accomplish. This is a major part of what many people call public relations.

A good public opinion of you, your fellow workers, and your city has to be earned. Do not

confuse it with publicity, which means tooting your own horn—telling other people what a good job you are doing. Public relations start with providing good service. Your department should always be looking for better and less expensive ways of getting the job done. It should also be trying to prevent problems, if at all possible.

For example, the fire department helps people learn how to prevent fires and to recognize fire hazards.

The building inspector's office advises people on how to construct a safe, strong home or office building. The police department gives tips on ways to prevent burglaries. Is there a preventive or educational service your department can provide to reduce its work load and improve the health, safety, or well-being of the people in your city?

Public relations is a job for



## Continued

everybody—the building official, the permit tech, plans examiners, and building inspectors. It is not something you can delegate to a public relations director or public information officer. Every city employee represents the local government to the people. This is true both on the job and off. Many people in your community may never meet the mayor or the major department heads, but their impressions of your city will be created by you and other employees—the inspector who inspects a water heater change-out, the plans examiner who helps an owner with remodeling questions, or the customer service representative who directs people to the right office.

Think of the citizens you serve as your customers, all of whom wear several different hats and belong to several different groups. When you try to determine what your citizen customers think of the quality of service you deliver—and you should be doing this on a regular basis—it may be easier to find ways to get this kind of information if you examine your relationship with these groups.

The following list of groups is by no means complete, but it should help you get started in making a list of your own:

- Taxpayers: homeowners, business operators
- Visitors from other cities and states
- Public officials: city officials, county officials, state and federal officials
- Students and teachers: elementary schools, high schools, colleges
- Community organizations:

chamber of commerce, civic associations, neighborhood associations

- Communications media: local and area newspapers, radio, television
- Demographic groups: disabled persons, elderly citizens, young people, ethnic groups, minorities

It is a common mistake on the part of government officials to assume that newspaper coverage, because it is extensive and informative, will reach all segments of the community. A similar mistake is to assume that a diversified governmental reporting program—an annual report, tax leaflets, informational fliers, and frequent newspaper announcements—will reach all segments of the community.

Some people can't read; some people won't read. You and others in your city can best reach these hard-to-reach people by serving them well. Let people you serve know they are important to you. Think about their personal convenience (as well as yours) when you plan your work schedule. When you and your associates serve all people well, you will be sending a positive message to all people in your community.

Practice timing and courtesy by letting people know when work must be done and by being courteous at all times with all people:

- Building inspectors should not expect a friendly welcome if they knock on a door unannounced. Owners of homes or businesses should be notified a few days in advance and given a

choice of dates and times if they are to be visited by fire or building code inspectors.

- When codes are updated, the local home builder association and trade associations should be contacted before, during, and after the code adoption process.
- Announcements in newspapers and on the radio should warn owners that a permit is required for work done in their homes or businesses.
- If the building department is going to be closed for the holidays, post notices at the front counter and on the Web site.

A direct way to find out the level of citizen satisfaction with the services you deliver is to conduct a comprehensive citizen satisfaction survey. Chances are you will need the cooperation of your department or your entire organization in order to accomplish this task. You'll need some expert help in designing a meaningful survey and determining the right size of sample for statistically valid results.

Another method of capturing how citizens feel about the quality of service your work unit provides is to create a short questionnaire. These forms are often in a checklist format that can be easily distributed or made available at your work site, such as on a countertop where citizens conduct their business with you.

This type of form provides you with instant and direct feedback that can yield excellent results. Citizens will perceive that you

## Continued

really do care about what they think, and you will receive some helpful feedback on the level of quality you provide. This kind of information can prove invaluable for budget preparation and for developing short- and long-range work schedules and plans.

People today demand that their city have good leadership, good management, and good services. And they will hold the city accountable. People today will not support or cooperate with a government agency that fails to deliver services promptly, efficiently, and courteously. So remember—delivering quality service results in good public relations.

- Chris Haver, CBO, College Station

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