

FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 139: 1907 (FIRE DOORS/REGULATORY COMPLIANCE)

By Richard Schulte

Among the technical committee reports presented at the eleventh Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association held in May 1907 was the Report of Committee on Fire Protecting Coverings for Window and Door Openings. The chairman of the Committee, W. C. Robinson, presented the Committee Report. The following is part of the discussion at the Meeting regarding the Committee Report.

*“Mr. Dana: Before leaving the subject of Fire Doors, as I understand you are going to now, I would like to say a word with reference to the adoption of uniform amendments to the rules, as they may be amended at this meeting. **Now, it seems to me the weakest point in our Association today is that the Fire Standards are not lived up to at all, and I should like to have the thing discussed now, and any representative of an organization which has not adopted the fire rules should give their reasons.**”*

*Mr. Robinson: **Gentlemen, I don't know of any more important matter before the Association now or that has been before us in the last two years than this question of proper protection of openings in fire walls. This question is being very sadly neglected throughout this country, more so in some sections than in others, and you can't serve, seriously serve, in furthering the objects of this whole organization better than by paying strict attention to the installation and use of methods that you are apparently satisfied with today. I have heard no objection of very great importance that we can't take care of, and yet in the past we have simply said nothing and gone back to our territories, our own cities and States, and done nothing. Now, the influence of one section of the country has often a very important influence on other sections. Contractors who are pursuing and employing one set of methods, standard methods, in one city, are publishing them in other cities and advocating the methods of their own towns and pointing out that they are not required to do things in their own cities that they are in the city in which they make their talk; and yet underwriters in both cities are members of this association. Men have come to me who are members of local organizations, and have told me of instances where they have given notice to manufacturers of Wired Glass Protection that after a certain date their product would not be tolerated, and the manufacturers have said to them, "We expected that action on your part three years ago, and we have not done it solely because we have not been asked to. It is cheaper to carry these cheaper things, but we welcome and we really expected such action for a number of years, and we have not done it simply because we have not been asked to do it." It is really our fault, in a great many cases, that we do not get the methods which we advocate and which we really know about.**”*

Mr. Stone: Is it the intention to print now a new edition covering the changes which have been passed upon today?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, sir.

Mr. Stone: Now, in what way can I get them distributed among the architects of the country? I do not think there is one architect in ten in this country that has got on his desk your rules, and yet I think it is of the utmost importance that every one should have a copy of them. In what practical way can I have them distributed to the architects of the country?

Mr. W. D. McGill: Mr. Chairman, in Pittsburg I have a list of all the architects of that city, and I keep them posted with the rules and regulations of this Association by sending to Mr. Merrill for the rules, which he sends to me, every new rule. Mr. Merrill sends me on application every new rule that comes out, and I send the same to every architect in Allegheny County. We have notified, long ago, persons making shutters that they will have to be up to the standard. Persons using metal frames and wired glass have also been notified.

Mr. Stone: I will say, Mr. Chairman, if our secretary has them furnished to him, he has instructions that they be distributed among all the members of the American Institute of Architects, and if the insurance people will take it upon themselves, as the gentleman from Pittsburg has done, to see that the architects in their sections keep thoroughly informed, it would be of great value to the insurance people and to our Association as well.

Mr. J. R. Sullivan: Mr. Chairman, in reference to that same subject, my board has sent architects copies of the Fire Specification and Fire Standards, and I think most of them have gone into the waste paper basket, because when I have gone to their offices and asked them where were the Fire Board specifications, they have not got them— four out of every five won't have a copy in their office.

Mr. W. D. McGill: In answer to that, Mr. Chairman, in fixing a schedule, if we find it is not standard we charge the owner, and the owner is going to have an architect who looks after his interest. I know of an instance where the architect failed to carry out the wishes of the owner of the building, and down in Pittsburg we make it look like a taxation, so an architect has to be mindful of his client or his client has to pay for it. Therefore, the client looks after the architect.

The discussion on compliance with fire safety requirements held a little over a century ago doesn't sound all that different from discussions on the subject today. The two issues with respect to compliance with the fire safety aspects of building regulations identified in the discussion above are basic knowledge of the regulations and then actual enforcement of the regulations.

In order to comply with fire safety regulations, an architect, contractor or building owner must have knowledge of the regulations, however, knowledge of regulations is not always enough. If we expect those responsible for compliance with regulations to actually comply with regulations, more than a little enforcement of the regulations is necessary. Without a little enforcement, those responsible for compliance conclude that compliance isn't all that important and concentrate their efforts and energies on other things.

Enforcement of building fire safety regulations encourages those responsible for compliance to become familiar with the building regulations being enforced. Hence, enforcement of regulations is closely linked with the learning of the regulations by design professionals and building contractors, as well as building owners.

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