

**FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 173: 1921  
(NBFU MUNICIPAL FIRE DEFENSE STUDIES)**

By Richard Schulte

Among the various recommendations included in the Resolutions proposed at the NFPA's Annual Meeting held in 1921 included a reference to the evaluation of the fire defenses of various municipalities, referred to as "municipal grading" or "town grading". The following is an excerpt from the Resolutions:

*"The President: The next order of business is the reading of our platform, or annual Resolutions. Mr. R. G. Malone of New Orleans will present this.*

***Resolutions, Annual Meeting, June 14, 1921.***

*The National Fire Protection Association, assembled in San Francisco for its twenty-fifth annual meeting, bespeaks the continued observance by the people of the United States and Canada, both privately and in their occupations, of all measures for conservation of our resources. The supreme need of the war impoverished European world for foodstuffs and the products of North America imposes an obligation upon [yo]u to safeguard to the extent of our intelligence and ability every form of natural and created resource. The elimination of waste, at all times the duty of good citizenship, is at this moment a profound public and private responsibility.*

*In its warfare against the needless sacrifice of human life and property by fire the Association advocates the following measures:*

[TEXT OMITTED]

*7. A careful study of the technical surveys of cities made by **the engineers of the Committee on Fire Prevention of the National Board of Fire Underwriters** covering the items of water supplies, their adequacy and reliability, fire department efficiency, fire alarm systems and conflagration hazards, and of the possibility of co-operation among neighboring cities through mutual aid and the standardization of hose couplings.*

[TEXT OMITTED]"

The importance of the NBFU's "municipal grading" work in preventing conflagrations which wiped out large portions of cities is often overlooked. The "municipal grading" work gave cities the benefit of the NBFU's knowledge on how to prevent conflagrations, as well as gave municipalities an incentive to improve their fire defenses. The "municipal grading" affected fire insurance rates, hence, municipalities with a better "grading" were rewarded with lower fire insurance rates. Higher infrastructures costs for municipal fire defenses (such as fire apparatus and water supplies) were offset by lower fire insurance costs.

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**Source:** "*Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Annual [NFPA] Meeting*", San Francisco, California, 1921.