

## FIRE PREVENTION AND THE FIRE SERVICE

By Richard Schulte

A report developed by the Fire Analysis and Research Division of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) titled "*Third Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service*" dated June 2011 contains some very interesting information regarding fire prevention code enforcement and the fire service. The following are excerpts from this report addressing the issue of fire prevention code enforcement by the fire service:

***"One-quarter of fire departments (24%) do not have anyone conducting fire code inspections in the community, almost unchanged from 27% in 2001 and 25% in 2005." (Page 102)***

*"When fire-code inspections are conducted by someone, the most frequently cited party is "Other" (24%). Among the specified parties, the most frequently cited party conducting fire-code inspections was in-service firefighters (20%), followed by full-time fire department inspectors (19%), the building department (18%), and a separate inspection department (18%).]" (Page 102)*

*". . . In the earlier study, many departments were making extensive use of in-service firefighters to conduct fire-code inspections, and the departments not using in-service firefighters were also unable to come close to inspecting all or nearly all commercial properties once a year. In the later study, many departments had cut back or eliminated use of in-service firefighters for inspections, because stricter certification requirements for anyone performing inspections had made it impractical to continue using in-service firefighters. This shift also meant departments were not even attempting to inspect most properties subject to the fire code." (Page 103)*

Model building codes contain requirements which apply to the construction of new buildings. The fire prevention code is a maintenance code. Fire prevention codes require that fire safety features required by the building code be maintained throughout the life of a building.

Obviously, if fire safety features mandated by the building code are not maintained, then the level of fire safety intended by the building code may not be achieved as buildings age.

It seems to make little sense to mandate numerous fire safety features in new building construction and then to simply allow these features to be defeated, removed or not be maintained by a building owner or tenants.

If the enforcement of the fire prevention code is not a priority in the fire service, it would not be unreasonable to question the need for many of the fire safety features mandated by building codes. In other words, by the lack of code enforcement, the fire service is telling the public what it thinks about the importance of compliance with construction codes.

Fire prevention code enforcement is important if we expect our buildings to provide a high level of fire safety for our citizens.

The report titled "*Third Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service*" can be found on the Research webpage at the NFPA website, [nfpa.org](http://nfpa.org).

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