

Desired Outcomes for Wisconsin Building Safety and Fire Safety Programs

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Forward

This paper was developed by the Alliance for Regulatory Coordination in an effort to raise awareness of the building safety and fire safety programs of Wisconsin. It communicates desired outcomes relative to the proposed merger of the Department of Financial Institutions and Department of Safety and Professional Services.

The ARC is a consortium of business, professional, trade and advocacy organizations involved in building design, construction and regulatory services. The Alliance seeks regulatory services provided in the most efficient manner possible to facilitate economic development, and more importantly, to promote the health, safety and welfare of Wisconsin citizens and visitors.

Members of the Alliance include:

Associated Builders and Contractors of Wisconsin

Association of Licensed Architects -Wisconsin

International Association of Electrical Inspectors,
Wisconsin Chapter

International Code Council

National Electrical Contractors Association,
Wisconsin Chapter

Plumbers Union Local 75

Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors, Wisconsin
Association

Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin

Water Quality Association of Wisconsin

Wisconsin Alliance for Fire Safety

Wisconsin Code Officials Alliance

Wisconsin Electrical Trades Council

Wisconsin Fire Protection Coalition

Wisconsin State Fire Chief's Association

Wisconsin State Fire Inspectors Association

Wisconsin Propane Gas Association

Background

Wisconsin has a 130 year history of regulating buildings to promote the health, safety and welfare of its citizens. Beginning with the 1885 law that required fire escapes for public buildings and places of employment, Wisconsin has often been a leader in promoting safety in the built environment.

Wisconsin became the second state in the nation to implement a statewide building code for public buildings and places of employment when, in 1914, it adopted the first Wisconsin Commercial Building Code. At the time, only New York and Wisconsin had such codes.

Homes have been regulated since 1978 through the state One- and Two- Family Dwelling Code.

Current Situation

At the state level, constructed environments in Wisconsin are primarily regulated by the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services.

Alliance for Regulatory Coordination

The Alliance for Regulatory Coordination is interested in the potential merger of the DFI and the DSPS because the building safety and fire safety programs of the DSPS significantly address and serve the building design and construction industries, fire departments, municipal governments and Wisconsin's citizens and visitors.

Desired Outcomes

While the Alliance applauds Governor Walker's attention to reforming state government, we encourage state policy makers and implementers to focus on the following outcomes to most benefit Wisconsin citizens and businesses.

Ensure capacity to provide timely service. Be it plans review, inspection, licensing or code development, the building design, construction and regulation segments of Wisconsin's economy, as well as building owners, rely on timely, high quality services from the DSPS and its agents. We encourage policies, service delivery mechanisms, and staffing levels that avoid service delays.

Maintain a high level of expertise among staff. The DSPS Building Safety and Fire Safety Programs have a long tradition of staff with a high level of expertise in their assigned program areas. We encourage that tradition be maintained through the continued staffing of every program and service with such experts so designers, builders, owners and local regulators can obtain the guidance and services necessary for a safe and productive Wisconsin.

Provide support for local safety officials. Hundreds of municipalities and fire departments administer state building safety and fire safety codes. We encourage state support to these local officials through state services of code development and interpretation, educational opportunities and periodic auditing, monitoring and mentoring.

Obtain citizen input during code development. We encourage the gathering of citizen and industry input during the code development process. Citizen advisory committees and councils offer an opportunity for developing consensus among designers, contractors, regulators and building owners in pursuit of reasonable administrative rules. Regulations developed without such input run the risk of not being understood or supported, and more importantly, negatively affecting both public safety and the Wisconsin economy.

Assign technical program experts as supervisors. We encourage having customers and programs placed at the center of attention by having staff sections be centered on customer groups and programs, not on geographical areas within the State. We believe that when technical program experts are assigned as supervisors there are greater opportunities for communication, effective program operation and the flow of respect among supervisors, staff and customers of the programs.

Keep lines of communication open. We encourage the regular posting of program operational and organizational information on the department's web site. Customers need to understand what is expected of them and who they can contact if questions arise. We also encourage the widespread use of email list services to inform interested customers about program changes and upcoming events such as educational opportunities, code development meetings and hearings, as well as new laws or administrative rules that may affect them.

The Alliance for Regulatory Coordination is ready to work with public officials and other interested parties to promote efficient and effective operation of state and local building and fire safety programs.

You can learn more about the Alliance for Regulatory Coordination at www.4arc.org.