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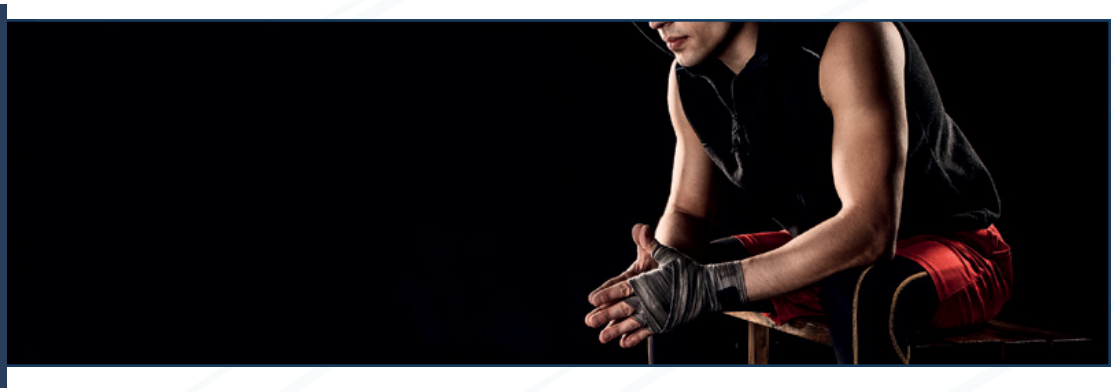

FEATURE ARTICLE

I FOUGHT THE CODE, BUT THE CODE WON

by Ryan Dalgleish, CSI - Chief Operating Officer I Air Barrier Association of America

As we transition to more energy efficient buildings and NET ZERO goals, our construction practices will need to change and, in some cases, quite dramatically. This will include changes such as:

- New materials being used
- Different construction sequence
- New strategies for the building enclosure configuration
- HVAC systems that use non-traditional energy sources
- Renewable energy integration
- Design concepts change, including specification and construction drawings
- Code enforcement to verify minimum energy standards are met

Prior to jurisdictional requirements and a "you have to do this" versus "it would be nice to do this", we tend to be more in a reactive position than pro-actively looking forward and transitioning to the new normal of building construction.

Buildings have a significant part to play in the overall strategy to get to Net Zero energy and Net Zero emissions. Transportation will play a part, agriculture, the oil and gas industry and other industries that contribute negatively to climate impact. Buildings are a very significant piece to the overall goal.

Recently in several states, work has started and is currently being undertaken to update energy codes. As it has been a long time since that has happened in some jurisdictions, the proposals sometimes focus on adopting older versions of the energy codes rather than adopting recent energy codes available. The International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) and ASHRAE 90.1 are the two "model codes" that are used by various states to adopt. Rather than adopt versions of the code that were updated in 2018, 2020 and later, some states are adopting code from 2012.

So what does that mean?
Many states are adopting energy codes that are already old and outdated. By the time there is another update being done at the state level, we will probably be farther behind, as national codes move at a much quicker pace than the individual states. I was surprised in the past how much the various states are behind in adopting model national codes. In some cases, over the years, a state could be 10 or more years behind! I was somewhat shocked by this and how there is uneven adoption of codes across the board. The national building codes only become enforced once the state adopts them, typically with amendments.

So, here is the dilemma we face:

- We have policies and goals being set on a national basis
- We have states adopting green energy practices in an uncoordinated fashion with no mandatory adoption timeline
- We have energy codes being adopted that are already 5, 6, 7 or more years old
- We have an industry resistant to change
- We have a mindset of only doing the bare minimum that we need to

How do we fix this?
I have the feeling that history will repeat itself that we approach this challenge in a reactive position when we absolutely are forced to.

What would be nice?
To at least start to adapt and change how we build when not forced to do so by regulations, policies, and code requirements. If we took small steps each year to begin to integrate approaches to get the end goal of Net Zero energy and emissions, the transition will be much smoother rather than waiting for the "you have to do this". In the short-term, we would start to reap some of the benefits. I am sure we will hear: it's too expensive, we do not build like that, it's a pain to do, etc. My hope is that each state adopts and updates codes on a regular and consistent basis and we as contractors can become strong advocates for change for the better and mitigate the traditional approach of putting things off until we are forced. If that is not the case, I would hope that at least we adopt the most updated and relevant codes, which seems like an easy thing to accomplish.