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Objective-Based Codes: A Progress Report

By
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Secretary
Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes

Excellent progress is being made in the development of the objective-based codes, thanks to the hard work of many industry volunteers, who are collaborating with the provinces and territories, staff at NRC's Canadian Codes Centre and the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes. The first phase of the process, the exhaustive analysis of three of the model national codes (building, fire and plumbing codes) to determine the objective(s), intent(s) and application of each and every provision, was completed and subjected to an external review. In the fall of 2002, portions of the database will periodically be posted on a public web site. The current plan is to publish the entire Intents Analysis database as a CD, for sale, beginning in February 2003.

Objectives of the Model National Codes

At its fall 2001 meeting, the Commission reviewed the results of the public consultation on the objectives of the model national codes. The final step in the process is confirmation of the Commission's decisions by the provincial/territorial deputy ministers, expected this summer.

Prototype Objective-Based Codes

The details of the structure of the new objective-based codes continue to be worked out under the supervision of a joint task group of the Commission and the provinces and territories. Documents embodying the complete restructured building, fire and plumbing codes have been promised to the provinces and territories for their review by the end of July 2002. The Commission is expected, at its fall 2002 meeting, to approve the release of these prototype codes for public consultation.

At the same meeting, the Commission will release for public consultation the technical changes that have been proposed for the national codes. These proposed changes are now being reviewed by the provinces and territories.

The Public Consultations

The public consultations will take place between October 15, 2002 and January 15, 2003, in a two-part process. The first part will address the prototype objective-based codes. These prototypes will be based on the 1995 model national codes. The major differences are in the addition of new content related to the Objectives, Functional Statements and information addressing how to use the new codes, as well as the elimination of provisions that do not reflect the agreed objectives (scope) of the codes. Where a province or territory has other objectives or variations of the objectives of the national codes, these will be presented at the same time. Reviewers familiar with the 1995 codes will be able to easily compare these with the prototypes.

The second part of the public consultation, concerning the proposed technical changes, will be largely web-based. However, it is expected that there will also be “traditional” public presentations on the major features of the proposed changes. Again, because this is a coordinated national/provincial/territorial review, provincial/territorial technical changes will be presented at the same time.

Next Steps

The results of the public consultations will be carefully analyzed. The provinces and territories will play an important role in this work, especially regarding the prototype codes, because of their interest in ensuring that the new codes are easy to use, administer and enforce.

With regard to the technical changes, staff at the Canadian Codes Centre will compile the consultation results for evaluation by the Standing Committees. The Standing Committees will then make recommendations concerning the technical content of the new code documents. The provinces and territories will have an opportunity to review the recommendations before they are presented to the Commission in the Fall of 2003.

With the structure of the objective-based model national codes confirmed and the technical changes agreed upon, the new documents can be prepared for the approval of the Commission. This approval is expected to take place at its fall 2003 meeting. This will be followed by final editing, translation and publication. It is anticipated that the new objective-based model codes will be available for the use by June 2004.

Training and Education

It is accepted that there will be a need for training and education when the new codes are introduced, in order to facilitate the transition. The provinces and territories have agreed to provide resources for the development of this “transition” training material. An assessment of training and education needs will be made at the time of the public consultations. The training materials will be developed and made available in advance of the adoption of the new codes. The priority will be the training of building officials associated with the building, fire and plumbing codes.

Staff Changes at the Canadian Codes Centre

Alastair Aikman, the Technical Advisor to the Standing Committee on Fire Safety and Occupancy, has retired from the Canadian Codes Centre after 15 years of service. Denis Bergeron has taken over his work, while retaining his responsibilities as Senior Technical Advisor for Objective-Based Codes. The vacancy created by Mr. Aikman’s retirement will be filled in the near future.