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By Luc Saint-Martin, Secretary of the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes

UPDATE ON OBJECTIVE-BASED CODES

At the last annual meeting of OBOA in August 1997, I spoke to you about why and how the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes was moving to an objective-based format for the next edition of the national model codes.

As you recall, this decision was prompted by the need to provide model codes that meet the needs of all code users in Canada. This meant that codes had to be understandable, justifiable, logical and flexible. The CCBFC considered that an objective-based code structure would achieve this goal.

The plan is to produce a set of improved codes for the year 2001. The work is being carried out in several phases and is overseen by a task group with representatives from industry and provincial/territorial governments. The first phase involves a complete review of all code requirements to identify their application and intent. This work, referred to as the bottom-up analysis, is being carried out by groups of experts from industry and government working with the codes staff of NRC's Institute for Research in Construction. The resulting intent statements are being reviewed by the standing committees and the work should be completed within one year. Intent statements are being posted on the IRC codes Internet site as they are approved by the standing committees.

Concurrently, the Task Group on the Implementation of Objective-Based Codes has been trying to sort out what it is exactly that is in the codes. Although it is generally accepted that the scope of the National Building Code is health, safety and accessibility, work on the intent statements has revealed that the NBC currently contains requirements that are related to objectives other than health, safety and accessibility. At this time, the committees have identified provisions that can clearly be assigned to objectives such as the protection of property (e.g., differential settlement, limiting distance), the protection of community assets (e.g., resistance to forced entry).

Once all of the objectives currently in the codes are identified, they will be widely circulated. The scope of the codes will not be augmented or reduced without the benefit of public discussion and consultation. Any such consultation would likely occur in the fall of 1999.

Meanwhile, the Task Group on the Implementation of Objective-Based Codes has been discussing various possible formats for the new codes. Though nothing has been decided by the Commission, it appears at this time that a two-part document could be the most appropriate. Part A would contain the objectives and functional requirements while Part B would essentially be a revised and updated set of technical requirements as we know them, restructured to reflect the configuration of Part A.

It is envisaged at this time that authorities would adopt Part A within their legal framework and refer to Part B as an "approved" or "deemed to satisfy" solution.

You can follow the development of the Objective-Based Codes by visiting CCBFC on the Internet at <http://www.ccbfc.org>. To get information about the Task Group on the Implementation of Objective-Based Codes, go to http://www.ccbfc.org/ccbfc/tgs/obc/impTG/index_E.shtml. You can also have a look at the intent statements database at <http://www.ccbfc.org/ccbfc/intents/>.