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By Luc Saint-Martin

National Model Construction Codes

Welcome to our first column, which we hope will be an ongoing series designed to tell you about what is happening on the National Codes scene and about related activities such as research and product evaluation in support of codes. The purpose of this introductory article is to tell you who we are, what we are doing and what is on the horizon.

The National Model Construction Codes are the responsibility of the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes (CCBFC), an independent committee of senior individuals from all aspects of the construction industry and the regulatory community, across Canada. The CCBFC directs the work of the various technical standing committees that are responsible for subject areas in the codes. Standing committees are also composed of experts from industry and government, with wide geographical distribution across the country.

The Commission is chaired by Bruce Clemmensen, a builder from Weston, Ontario. There are seven other members from Ontario, including Garry Davis, former president of the OBOA. In order for the Commission and its standing committees to operate, the National Research Council of Canada provides them with technical and administrative support through the Canadian Codes Centre of the Institute for Research in Construction (IRC).

The National Model Construction Codes include the National Building Code (NBC), which forms the basis for the Ontario Building Code (OBC) and all other building codes across Canada.

About one year ago, the Commission approved a strategic plan to ensure that its work continues to be relevant to Canadians and that the National Codes meet the needs of code users in Canada. Accordingly, it established, as its first priority, to provide model codes that are clear, logical and flexible. To achieve this goal, the Commission decided to move to an objective-based structure for all model codes. The concept has received widespread support, and provincial regulatory authorities have already indicated they are favourable to it.

Currently, most of the activities of the standing committees and Canadian Codes Centre revolve around the transition to objective-based codes. This proposed new framework for building and fire codes will provide codes that are easier to use and understand, more logically organized, more applicable to renovation, and more supportive of innovation. At the same time, the codes will retain the benefits of today's excellent prescriptive-based documents. The key to these new codes is understanding their intent; initial work is therefore concerned with defining the intent of all code requirements. Once standing committees have agreed on these intents, they will be made available to code users, primarily via the Internet.

Future articles will keep you posted on the development of objective-based codes and other interesting initiatives at the Canadian Codes Centre including:

- Task Group on Codes Development and Review Process in Canada
- Objective-Based Codes - Truths and Myths
- The Canadian Construction Materials Centre (IRC's product evaluation group)
- Durability and Building Codes
- Task Group on Possible Additional Benefits of Sprinklers in Buildings
- The Model National Energy Codes
- Task Group on Egress for Persons with Disabilities
- Progress on the CCBFC Strategic Plan
- Code-related Research at IRC

Information on the above is available from

Canadian Codes Centre
Institute for Research in Construction
National Research Council of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0R6
Telephone: (613) 993-9960
Fax: (613) 952-4040

The activities of the CCBFC and the programs and activities of IRC are also featured in IRC's national quarterly newsletter, "Construction and Innovation," which is issued free of charge. There are also numerous Internet pages. A good place to start is <http://www.nrc.ca/irc/>

Luc Saint-Martin is a member of the Canadian Codes Centre at NRC's Institute for Research in Construction.