

Plumbing Inspections

Who Needs 'Em??

Before this question can be considered we need to ask and answer another question. Who *benefits* from inspections, and if the answer is “the customer”, then who is the customer?

Codes represent minimum community standards. The Building Department of each jurisdiction prepares and presents recommendations for City Council adoption of construction standards (Codes) that are appropriate for their community. Codes define what are considered to be the *minimum* design and installation requirements necessary to protect the health and safety of the public served. To ensure that new installations are built in compliance with these standards it is necessary to have ongoing work inspected by personnel who possess specialized technical knowledge in addition to expertise in the related Code(s). The best inspectors are those with broad-based practical experience to accompany their knowledge of all applicable Code(s).

The inspector's role is to serve as the owner's representative during the construction process, the objective being to ensure that the finished product complies with no less than the *minimum* allowable construction standards (Codes). Each of us, as owners or users of private and commercial structures, benefit from competent inspections and the resultant safe buildings. The inspector is the only individual involved with construction of a structure who is not influenced by the expectation of personal gain or benefit at the completion of the project. An inspector is influenced solely by his/her dedication to fair and uniform application of Codes, Regulations, and applicable Standards. The other professionals involved in this process, such as developers, designers, and contractors are looking for ways to minimize costs. Being frugal may unintentionally result in inferior and non-compliant construction. These individuals are motivated to be as competitive as possible, but this goal frequently results in a product that does not comply with Code. Without corrective input from the Inspectors these violations (deficiencies) would likely remain as part of the finished product. Shoddy or deficient construction is usually less costly up front than Code-compliant construction and tends to become the norm in jurisdictions where there is no Code enforcement. It is the inspector's job in his/her role as representative of the owner and the local jurisdiction to make certain that every new building meets no less than minimum Code requirements.

Many violations occur because a builder is unaware of local Code requirements. Others occur because the contractor dips below minimums to save on the cost of doing business. In either case the inspector's job is to draw attention to the violation(s) and the need for Code-compliant corrections. Because there may be substantial costs involved in making these corrections it is essential that inspectors not make bogus calls. Accordingly we require that when a violation is noted it is to be accompanied by a citation of the Code Section that is being violated. We also

provide additional layers of oversight and verification by having Field Supervisors and Section Heads available to research controversial issues before a final judgment is made. Second and third opinions virtually eliminate errors of interpretation and mistaken calls in the field.

In answer to the original question, we all benefit from high quality inspections, including the contractors, designers and developers. Competent professionals seldom complain when mistakes are discovered. The fact that inspectors routinely find Code violations of varying severity serves as confirmation that without quality inspections buildings would be less safe and of less true value. It is evident that quality inspections are essential to the health and safety of the public, and to the structural quality of the community as a whole.