



ICC NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Steve Dagers
1-888-ICC-SAFE (422-7233), ext. 4212
SDagers@IccSafe.org

Industry Experts Target Using Best Practices, Educational Opportunities to Combat Fires in Buildings under Construction

A roundtable of experts determined that educating construction workers and property owners and managers on existing safety measures is one of the best ways to combat fires in buildings under construction. The roundtable, initiated by the [International Code Council](#) (ICC), [National Association of Home Builders](#) (NAHB) and [National Multifamily Housing Council](#) (NMHC), brought together code and fire officials, contractors and others with technical expertise to review an outbreak of fires in buildings under construction that recently caused major property damage and personal injury.

“A recent National Fire Protection Association report shows that over a five-year span, U.S. fire departments responded to at least 830 construction site fires that resulted in more than \$56 million in property damages, and another 400 fires were reported from properties undergoing renovations,” explained ICC CEO Dominic Sims, CBO. “At least 12 citizens and 70 firefighters were injured during these blazes. Bringing together a diverse group of experts to address this complex and burgeoning issue not only will enhance the health, safety and welfare of the built environment, but better protect the individuals who are involved in its construction.”

In addition to Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations, there are a number of best practices available to prevent construction site fires, including building code requirements and safety practices that contractors can implement daily. There are advocacy efforts as well, including the NAHB/Builders Mutual Safety Award for Excellence Program that recognizes the achievements of builders and trade contractors who have developed and implemented high-quality construction safety programs.

“We have to educate the workforce,” said Ron Nickson, Vice President of Codes for the NMHC. “It’s like the hard hat issue 25 years ago, when only half of the people were wearing them on construction sites. With the technology we have today, we have to really start educating on fire safety issues, especially with the economy coming out of the recession and with so many new members of the workforce.”

[Chapter 33 of the International Building Code](#) (IBC) provides requirements for construction site safety and provisions for protecting adjacent properties. IBC fire-related requirements include the

installation of barriers around the site, proper storage for materials and equipment, having at least one fire extinguisher onsite, temporary exits, and the installation of standpipes for structures four or more stories in height.

Other best practices for construction site fire safety include:

- Requiring permits for all hot work;
- Implementing [Fire Watch](#) precautions for combustible materials that are located in areas near hot work;
- Banning cooking on construction sites;
- Relegating smoking to areas outside of construction sites;
- Applying “good housekeeping” rules for rubbish and waste;
- Installing onsite security to prevent unauthorized persons from gaining entry;
- Developing a pre-fire plan and providing fire department access to the construction site;
- Scheduling pre- and post-inspection site visits with inspectors; and
- Holding daily meetings with workers to discuss potential fire safety hazards.

The roundtable examined other methods for better educating the workforce on construction site fire safety, including:

1. The possible development of a construction site fire safety manager certification program. A similar curriculum exists in New York City where individuals are trained to be responsible for ensuring that construction, alteration and demolition work is conducted in compliance with the New York City Fire Code, which is based on the *International Fire Code*.
2. The possible development of a penalty system for construction sites that do not have fire safety plans in place. One of the penalties could be a building or fire department’s refusal to conduct inspections until a plan has been developed.
3. Designing informational pamphlets, orientations and a series of webinars highlighting the importance of having a fire safety plan.

“The supervisor can designate a person to be trained and responsible for fire safety on the construction site,” explained Georgia State Fire Marshal Dwayne Garriss, who serves on the ICC Board of Directors. “In return, we won’t issue any permits or conduct any inspections until a fire safety plan is in place. There will need to be better integration between the fire and building departments to make sure one or both have reviewed the plan.”

Other organizations represented in the roundtable included the American Wood Council, Howard County, Md., Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits, Independent Electrical Contractors, International Association of Fire Chiefs, International Association of Fire Fighters, International Code Consultants, LiUNA, Lend Lease Construction LMB, Lincoln Property Company, Marshall A. Klein &

Associates, M. Nowak Consulting, National Association of State Fire Marshals, National Fire Academy, National Fire Protection Association, Portland Cement, City of Rockville, Md., The Hanover Company, Travelers Insurance and Washington County, Md.

A report of the roundtable's findings will be issued by Sept. 15, which is timely considering the recent outbreak of construction site fires that will have lasting impacts on jurisdictions across the country, according to Fire Chief Alan Perdue of Greensboro/Winston-Salem, N.C., who chaired the roundtable and also serves as Executive Director of the Safer Buildings Coalition. "When we have one of these incidents, who does it affect? All of us," Perdue said. "We don't have time not to take this seriously."

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About us: The [International Code Council](#) is a member-focused association. It is dedicated to developing model codes and standards used in the design, build and compliance process to construct safe, sustainable, affordable and resilient structures. Most U.S. communities and many global markets [choose the International Codes](#).