

# YOUR VOICE AT THE INTERNATIONAL CODE COUNCIL

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If you've ever attended a building or fire code development hearing, you can relate to the adage about sausage making "unpleasant truths about it emerge that make it much less appealing."

As important as these codes are to protect the public and firefighters—as well as increase on-scene operational effectiveness—the code development process can seem daunting to the uninitiated. Conflicting public testimony, rapid-fire voting, and the legalese of code language complicate the process and often require expert interpretation to ensure the final product is what the proponent wanted.

Fortunately, an alternative exists for those who would rather dip their toes in the code development process rather than dive in head first: the International Code Council Fire Service Membership Council (FSMC). Registration for the FSMC is free to any International Code Council (ICC) member, and anyone can participate in the work it accomplishes. The FSMC provides a great training ground for anyone who wants to learn more about the code development process.

## Membership Councils

In addition to the FSMC, the ICC has membership councils titled Emerging Leaders, Building Officials, Sustainability, ICC Global, and PMG (Plumbing, Mechanical, and Gas). These membership councils are free to join for ICC members interested in any or all of the councils that might represent their interests.

The membership councils have three main purposes: they serve as advocates for concerns and issues that are of interest to their discipline; they assist the ICC in increasing participation in the ICC code development process; and they advise the ICC on programs and policies, legislative

matters, code adoption issues, and other matters the council deems appropriate. While the technical work on code changes is performed by other committees, many emerging issues and trends are heard first at the 400+-member FSMC as a sounding board for further action.

Each membership council is led by an 18-member governing committee that sets the council agenda for the year. Normally, seats on the governing committee are elected, but the FSMC Governing Committee is unique because 14 of the positions are appointed by the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the National Association of State Fire Marshals. These appointments ensure the FSMC will have strong fire service representation that represents leading organizations. This year's governing committee chairman is Scott Adams, retired deputy chief and district fire marshal from Park City.

The FSMC works closely with its partner group, the Building Official Membership Council (BOMC), to ensure cooperative relationships and good communications among the principals. Both councils have permanent liaisons to the other, so matters of joint interest are shared.



*Limited access complicates firefighting and rescue operations. Circumstances like these are discussed at the Fire Service Membership Council to explore solutions and alternatives.*

## Emerging Issues

Over the last two years, the FSMC and BOMC have been particularly active promoting important federal legislation related to fire protection and life safety. The groups were successful at getting the full ICC Board of Directors to write to Congress to support the Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act, the Nicholas and Zachary Burt Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Prevention Act, and the Campus Fire Safety Act of 2017. Working with a coalition of The Center for Campus Fire Safety, Campus Firewatch, and CampusFire-Safety.com, the FSMC collaborated to support the Kerry Rose Fire Sprinkler Notification Act. The bill requires colleges and universities that maintain on-campus student housing to notify students whether the housing is equipped with fire safety systems, including sprinklers.



*The Fire Service Membership Council succeeded in getting the ICC Board of Directors to support improved carbon monoxide detection and awareness in residential properties.*

The FSMC was instrumental in the development and presentation of the ICC's new Innovation in Code Administration Award. The award was created to recognize those communities that provide creative leadership in addressing fire and building code challenges. The City of St. Paul, Minnesota, Department of Safety and Inspections received the inaugural award for its rental dwelling unit improvement program.

In 2016, the FSMC polled its membership to identify issues of importance. Not surprisingly, the leading responses included requests for more training. In response, one of the FSMC work groups this year conducted a national training needs assessment to see what specific areas needed improvement. The work group has collected the data and is analyzing the results.

At one recent meeting, Fire Chief Steven Lohr from Hagerstown, Maryland, presented a provocative program on combustible construction, building height and area, fire apparatus access, and fire sprinkler protection in multi-family dwellings. His FSMC presentation provided real-world examples on how code changes might be needed to improve firefighter access to podium buildings that include wood frame construction on top of fire resistive parking garages or retail space.

One of 2017's major efforts is to promote ICC certification exams for commercial fire alarm and sprinkler plan reviewer and inspectors. The exams are intended for code officials to be able to verify their competency that new and existing fire protection systems meet the requirements of the building or fire codes and standards.

### **Participation**

While ICC membership is required to be a "formal" member of any of the membership councils, the work of the membership councils is open to anyone who is interested. The FSMC, for example, has a training and education work group that includes a federal fire protection contractor who is not an ICC member.

Other FSMC work groups focus on collecting information for the FSMC web page and writing articles for trade journals,

increasing council membership, identifying fire protection and code training and education needs, and watching out for new and emerging issues that might affect fire protection and life safety, especially those that might develop into proposed code changes.

The FSMC meets face to face twice yearly at the ICC Committee Action Hearings and Annual Business Meeting. The governing committee conducts monthly teleconferences to track progress and discuss upcoming issues. All meetings and conference calls are open to the public.

### **Summary**

The ICC membership councils provide an opportunity to influence ICC policy, national fire safety issues for the public and firefighters, and emerging issues that affect code officials and first responders. Why not join today and have your voice heard as well?

### **Getting Involved**

If you are an ICC member, registration to join the Fire Service Membership Council is free and easy.

Go to the ICC home page at [www.iccsafe.org](http://www.iccsafe.org) and select the drop-down menu labelled "Membership." At the right-hand side of the pop-up menu, select "Councils." When it appears, click on the red Fire Service Membership Council logo, and you will see current fire news and issues. About two-thirds down the page, click on "Enroll Now" and follow the instructions. You will have to log in with your email address and password.

If you are not an ICC member but would like to participate, the FSMC Governing Committee holds regular conference calls on the third Thursday of every month at 1:30 p.m. Eastern time. The call-in number is 1.800.910.8278, and the access number is 8432131 followed by the # sign.