

# Importance of the Building Safety Division:

## Tough Economies Need Building Safety

(Excerpted from the International Code Council, 2008; by R. Trout)

Building safety and fire prevention codes address all aspects of construction, such as:

1. structural soundness of buildings,
2. reliability of fire prevention and suppression systems,
3. plumbing and mechanical systems, and
4. energy efficiency and sustainability.

To ensure buildings are safe requires the active and continual participation of building safety and fire prevention officials, architects, builders, engineers, and others in the construction industry, as well as property owners.

As properties change owners and take on new uses, everyone has a role in providing the first line of defense against building disasters. Inspectors, plan reviewers and others work to ensure the safety of the structures in which all of us live, work, attend school, worship and play. Code officials work to save lives and save dollars.

They prevent harm by ensuring compliance with building safety codes before a disaster occurs.

They address critical safety issues in the built environment so there is confidence that structures are safe and sound. Confidence in building safety is a key issue in today's economy.

Local building safety experts are paid to think about building safety and fire prevention every day, not just on an as-needed basis.

The important work code officials do is often overlooked until a catastrophic tragedy occurs.

### **How can local governments protect building safety in this difficult economic climate?**

Keep a fully staffed building inspections department. An understaffed or inexperienced inspections department can waste money and create liability. Inattention or neglect of the key governmental role in reducing risk and ensuring owner confidence can result in poorly-inspected homes and commercial buildings. Inspecting buildings at every stage of construction is essential and requires human resources with the proper training and experience.

When structures fail, the jurisdiction has failed in its commitment to provide a safe environment for its citizens. Such failure opens the jurisdiction to the possibility of expensive lawsuits and public relations damage.

Communities with poorly built or maintained homes result in areas of blight. The economic impact of such areas far outlasts any economic downturn we may currently be experiencing.

The insurance industry often considers quality of the building safety department when assigning rates to a town.

Even though new housing starts may be down, a fully staffed inspections department is still essential. Just as police and fire departments must be kept staffed, so should building departments. Simply stated, it's a matter of public safety.

Rebuilding an experienced inspections staff when construction begins again wastes time and money.

Inspectors have other responsibilities besides inspecting new homes. Duties such as property maintenance and proper inspection of existing buildings' renovations are essential for the upkeep of a community, making the difference as to where and when properties are purchased.

In these difficult times, the number of foreclosures and abandoned homes has increased. Regular property maintenance inspections help keep these homes from becoming a blight on a neighborhood, reduce the risks to public health and safety, and increase the interest of potential buyers.

Encouraging commercial building within a jurisdiction is essential for economic recovery. Companies will likely hesitate to build in areas where inspectors are not available to respond quickly to their plan review and inspection needs.

K:\Director\Budget docs 09 10\Importance of Building Safety Division.doc