

**SUSTAINABLITY - CODE ENFORCEMENT**

The current situation regarding building code enforcement varies dramatically throughout the world.

As might be expected, the industrialized nations lead the world in systematic code enforcement and the utilization of updated, contemporary building codes. The remainder of the world experiences a varying reduction in the level of code enforcement activities.

This differential runs the gambit from;

* out-of-date code documents
* poor code enforcement techniques
* no code enforcement of any kind

The detrimental impact of natural and man-made disasters has been well documented by multiple agencies around the globe.

Cause and effect studies have been produced noting;

* the expansion of the population
* the increasing settlements in low-lying areas
* lack of building materials
* lack of funds to support adequate disaster prevention programs

While many of the contributing factors are addressed repeatedly in disaster recovery activities, prevention remains a difficult program to fund. However, *“proper code enforcement is a program that can and should be implemented as a cornerstone of both prevention and recovery activities”.*

International investors and corporations have the ability to invest anywhere in the world. It is often to their financial advantage to build where labor costs are cheapest or raw materials are plentiful. However, corporations also consider the economic and political stability of countries. A question asked during their analysis is, *“how easy is it to conduct business*?”. A factor within that question is, what is the process involved with the business activity, including construction permits.

The view that a slack, or even a complete lack of code enforcement is preferred by corporations cannot be substantiated. Most investors require their investments to be protected to the maximum extent possible. That requirement often relates to specific countries and the coverage available from the insurance industry.

Better code enforcement opens the door to the insurance industry which increases the ability of property owners to protect their investments. Perhaps half of the countries in the world are underinsured or have no insurance presence at all. Insurance companies set their rates based on the management of risk involved. If a country has poor to no code enforcement activities, the insurance companies cannot rely on standardized benchmarks for construction performance that should be provided by governmental oversight. Without performance benchmarks, countries are not extended the insurance opportunities provided to the industrialized nations.

The presence of insurable buildings, and a verifiable code enforcement program creates the opportunity for advancing investments from economic development institutions i.e.: World Bank, International Development Banks, and Foundations. These institutions and others have a well-established history of investing in programs that serve humanity.

Increased code enforcement that improves the quality of construction, dovetails into many of the existing funded programs designed to improve the quality of life. As such, most of the current programs would benefit from increased building code activities.

The presence of insurable buildings creates the opportunity for advancing economic development and commerce. It opens the door to corporate investments from global companies. Led by the global re- Insurance companies, the investment perception toward a nation can change for the better as codes and standards are uniformly enforced.

As development increases, so do taxes and funds necessary for adequate disaster prevention programs. Job opportunities away from low-lying areas can draw population centers out of harm’s way. Sustainable, sanitary, safe housing becomes the goal throughout the underdeveloped world.

The standard of living increases for the citizens of nations which adopt better code enforcement practices. In the absence of a quality enforcement program, many of the quality-of-life aspects will not be achieved, or if achieved, will be short lived subject to the next natural disaster event.

**Proposed Solutions:**

WOBO proposes a three-part solution designed to promote;

* Sustainable,
* Safe, and
* Sanitary Structures.

**Part 1 - U**pdate the building codes utilized in the country. Many codes are significantly out-of-date and have not kept up with the latest technology, nor do they incorporate the improved knowledge derived from experience and use of standards. Changes and improvements to codes are ongoing and continuously impact buildings to increase sustainable, safe, and sanitary structures.

A country may choose to adapt and then adopt a set of building code documents that are currently enforced in another country. This is a common practice since it gives the adopting country a quick start in the upgrading process.

By adapting another country’s codes, the adopting country has the benefit of learning the advantages as well as any disadvantages that have been exposed through the application of the documents. Also, by reviewing a country’s experiences with a code, an analysis could be made of the potential impact a document might have on the adopting country, prior to any legislative activity necessary for adoption.

This may seem to be a daunting, even impossible task to incorporate a code document from another country.

An example of how this could work is the British Standards which serve as the basis of codes in many countries.

Another example reflects the code documents utilized in the United States.

However, there is no United States Building Code. Instead, a private sector business called the International Code Council, promulgates a set of model code documents. This is achieved through a membership comprised of building and fire officials, who in turn vote on the approval or disapproval of proposed code changes. This process happens annually and produces an updated version of the documents every three years.

The model code is then modified by local and state jurisdictions to comply with State Laws. As a model code, it is adopted by every State area in the United States. So, the code can be used in dramatically different climates and geographic areas, ranging from Alaska to Hawaii and California to Wyoming to Florida.

The above examples are used to highlight the possibilities of creating new or improving existing code documents. WOBO does not endorse a specific code document nor is WOBO affiliated with any code producing agencies.

**Part 2** - The establishment of a world-wide database collecting information on the current building code documents in use and the efforts supporting construction compliance with the code documents within any given country.

WOBO proposes the creation of a Country Classification Program (CCP) for use throughout the world. The CCP coordinates with established organizations working at a global level to create a system to classify countries based on the level of professionalism in code enforcement activities. If a global evaluation system can be implemented, it will aid the re-Insurance industry, financial institutions, international investors and ultimately the citizens of a nation.

The information collected for the database could be used to critically analyze, compare, and contrast the codes and code complying efforts of countries. In turn, this would allow for an analytical review to determine where additional funds might be spent for training, education, and code development.

The potential database could reflect questions and the creation of benchmarks for comparisons;

* *DO COUNTRIES HAVE A GRADING OR EFFICIENCY STANDARD?*
* *IS THERE A THIRD-PARTY OVERSIGHT OF CODE ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES?*
* *ARE CODE DOCUMENTS REVIEWED/UPDATED ON A PERIODIC BASIS?*
* *ARE STANDARDS IN PLACE REGARDING PROFESSIONALISM FOR CODE ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL?*

A goal might be to create a system that encourages countries to strive for advancement.

Advancement may be achieved through a Tier System with the goal of achieving Tier I status.

**TIER I**

Classification would consist of those countries with established, verifiable code enforcement practices that provide for the safety of the public. These countries have extensive participation from the property insurers allowing for a low risk factor related to property protection. These countries have well established global commerce and trade activity.

The tiered system would continue with four or five additional levels with decreasing frequency of code application and enforcement with the lower-level meeting none of the criteria of a quality code enforcement program.

**Part 3** - The advocation for Sustainable, Safe, and Sanitary Structures through education and training. Code enforcement personnel, design professionals, and members of the construction industry are vital elements of an informed, well-trained construction workforce supported by regular, consistent and continuous training. Knowledgeable individuals in all aspects of the built environment are essential as we strive towards the development of quality, compliant structures.

An extensive effort within the educational system and community is highly desirable and essential to change the mind-set of the general population. In some countries, densely populated cities have relatively low occurrences of structure fires. This can be attributed to the effort made by the government agencies to indoctrinate every eighteen-year-old person with fire safety training. After years of this practice, residents have a fire safety expert in nearly every household.

A similar effort could be attempted with educational awareness programs for early childhood, primary, and secondary students. Age-appropriate programs discussing the importance of sustainable, safe, and sanitary structures and the impact on our finances, health and well-being may have a significant and long-lasting influence on our future.

**Statement**

WOBO as a Professional Body has no affinity nor preference toward a particular set of code documents or national system of enforcement.

WOBO is concerned with the goal of increasing sustainable, safe, and sanitary structures throughout the built environment.

WOBO believes that without significant efforts being made towards quality and quantifiable code enforcement systems, sustainable, safe, and sanitary structures may be relegated to wishful thinking in many parts of the world.

As President of WOBO I trust this paper generates your interest and support throughout the many organizations that touch the construction world.

Best regards,

Paul E. Myers,

WOBO President

World Organization of Building Officials