VILLAGE OF MIDLOTHIAN
BUILDING DEPARTMENT

14801 S. Pulaski Road, Midlothian, IL 60445
P: (708) 385-8642   F: (708) 389-0255

The purpose of building codes are to establish minimum requirements to safeguard the public safety, health and general welfare through affordability, structural strength, means of egress facilities, stability, sanitation, light, ventilation, energy conservation, safety to life and property from fire and other hazards attributed to the built environment. Also, building codes provide safety to fire fighters and emergency responders during emergency operations.

Building codes are not a function of modern civilization but have evolved from the ancient world. One of the earliest requirements regarding regulation of structures dates to ancient Mesopotamia, the Code of Hammurabi (1800 BC) from what many believe was the first known building code. The Roman Empire also recognized the desirability of building codes. The collapse of an amphitheater, killing or injuring approximately 50,000 prompted regulations in 27 AD. However, Rome burned 37 years later in 64 AD and the cause has been debated for years but poor construction was certainly part of the problem.

The Assize of Buildings from London in 1189 regulated the method of building party walls which placed a high value on stone construction. Whether the Assize of Buildings was enforced is speculative at best since a fire in 1212 caused partial destruction of London. Then in 1666, the great fire of London burned uncontrolled for 5 days causing partial destruction of 15,000 buildings. After this fire Parliament passed the London Building Act. This cycle is all too familiar.

So much for over sea history. Let us just use Chicago and recent events. The most infamous fire in the U. S. was the Chicago Fire in 1871. The fire lasted 2 days, killed 250 people, destroyed 17,000 buildings, and left close to 100,000 homeless. Chicago then enacts a building code and fire prevention ordinance in 1875. The deadliest single building fire in U.S. history is in Chicago at the Iroquois Theater in 1903 killing at least 605 people. Who can forget Our Lady of Angels in 1957 when 92 children and 3 nuns die? This fire changed codes across the country. In 2003 Chicago's E-2 nightclub where 21 died and 50 are injured. Also, in 2003 the deadliest porch collapse in U.S. history happens in Chicago when 13 die and 57 are injured. Notice once again the historical cycle of ignorance and freewheeling construction, followed by emergency and tragedy, finally ending with adoption and promulgation of a building code.

Every major jurisdiction in this country has adopted a building code. The simplicity ends there. To say that building codes are a complex and confusing body of regulations would be an understatement. Building code regulations are written, rewritten, and interpreted by a legion of builders, manufacturers, architects, engineers, fire marshals and inspectors. To complicate matters there is no common language. There is no uniform building code in the United States. Four separate model codes are used as guides to compose hundreds of similar yet different local codes: The Building Officials & Code Administrators International (BOCA), The International Conference of Building Officials (ICBO), The Southern Building Code Congress International (SBCCI) and The Council of American Building Officials (CABO). Some communities develop a unique code (Chicago) while others do not have a building code at all.

In December 1994 in an effort to improve the building codes impact on construction the International Code Council (ICC) founders who are BOCA, ICBO and the SBCCI create the ICC in response to "technical disparities among the three sets of model codes now in use in the U.S." The ICC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing a single set of comprehensive and coordinated national building codes.

The Village of Midlothian has adopted the ICC Building Codes for your safety and will continue to adopt the recent versions of the codes. If you would like to know what codes are currently enforced, you can look up the codes on the Village's web site. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact the Building Department.