

Members Update 04/06/2020

We have been monitoring inspection activity throughout the State of Florida and we have some advice and thoughts to share with you. Most jurisdictions are appropriately only doing new construction inspections and even that is slowing to a crawl with the growing concerns related to COVID-19. If you have not already done so, we suggest you review your local operations policies related to essential personnel. We would suggest that regardless of your role as a fire inspector, there are several areas where your services are required and a positive impact can be made by remaining “in-service”. These include enforcement of state and local Emergency Orders, and supplementing operations staff

Although the Florida Fire Prevention Code gives us significant authority, we strongly encourage you to approach your local enforcement practices in a soft and reasonable manner. Executive Director Jon Pasqualone was quoted last week in a webinar hosted by the Safer Buildings Coalition, “Local code officials are urged to practice good common sense during this unprecedented time when considering inspection priorities.” The risks associated with COVID-19 transmission during this declared statewide emergency need to be considered and balanced against the fire safety code provisions we enforce during a non-pandemic environment. In this current pandemic environment, strict enforcement of the fire prevention codes may not be warranted and, in fact, may be counterproductive to mitigating the suffering and risks caused by COVID-19. We encourage you to consider the entire risk management equation before pursuing enforcement action during this time.

We need to realize that our customers are suffering extreme personal and financial hardship during this crisis. In many cases, our customers are at risk of losing their financial security, their own health and the health of family and friends. We need to take that impact into consideration during this national disaster environment. Flexibility and empathy in the performance of your role is key.

It is recognized that actions taken today will likely reflect on the outcomes of tomorrow through budgets, departmental mergers, or even legislative actions in our near future. In other words, if we require strict adherence to codes without exercising some discretionary authority, we will likely again see dramatic cuts to inspection programs across the State of Florida much like we did following the 2007-2008 economic crisis. This came at the hands of local and state policy makers who fielded complaints from the business community, contractors and building owners subject to the inspection requirements. Because we were seen as not being flexible then, we are still feeling some effects and we do not want to contribute to a sustainable argument for dissolving or consolidating inspection programs in other agencies.

If you are still “in-service” please make good use of your time now. Be effective. Catch up on those plans that are backlogged. Where you can, assist other municipal or county departments in performing their job functions. Complete some on-line professional development programs to improve your capabilities. Educate your administration about what you do and why they hired you to do it. Now is the time to dress up our prevention efforts and shine. Are fire inspectors essential? Yes, they are. Please use this as an opportunity to step-up and be viewed as an asset to your jurisdiction and the community you serve.

Stay safe and stay healthy!

Jon Pasqualone

Executive Director

David Woodside

President