

What You Need to Know About

Building Codes



Building codes provide the minimum standards under which buildings can be legally constructed. They are adopted and enforced to help safeguard the public health, safety and general welfare. This is accomplished through a variety of ways including through structural strength, means of egress, stability, sanitation, adequate light and ventilation, and energy conservation. Codes also provide safety to life and property from fire and other hazards attributed to the built environment, and provide safety to fire fighters and emergency responders during emergency operations. Codes provide protection to the public and to property in a comprehensive way.



AIA Minnesota

A Society of The American Institute of Architects

The primary purpose of building codes is to build safe buildings. In addition, they promote a degree of comfort for users of the buildings who are entitled to rely upon minimum construction standards for the safety and soundness of a building. This also allows for the production of building materials to standards that maintain quality of life and property values.

Codes play a vital roll in public safety and loss prevention and save lives by reducing property loss. They promote consistent guidelines for design professionals, suppliers and builders, and create a minimum standard on which the consumer may rely.

However, good building codes have little value if they are not properly enforced. Post-disaster investigations have revealed that lax code interpretation or buildings not built according to code have significantly contributed to the total damage. Building codes are generally enforced through building code departments via State or local agencies.

The architect is aware of these codes and the process. They can help you incorporate the code into your design, through the construction process and into occupancy of the building.

The following is a list of ten typical questions and answers to help clarify how they affect a project.

Top 10 Questions

Q1 What is the intent of the Building Code?

A1 To keep people safe in the built environment by establishing minimum requirements for structural strength and stability, fire protection, lighting, ventilation, sanitation, energy conservation, and life safety.

Q2 Are codes applicable to residential and commercial buildings?

A2 Yes, but there are different codes for each application, which are addressed by the Minnesota State Building Code. These can be found on their website at www.mncodes.org.

Q3 What codes have been adopted in Minnesota and what agencies are involved?

A3 The State has an excellent website listing the codes being enforced at www.mncodes.org. The Minnesota Department of Labor & Industry is responsible for implementing the code through project reviews and site inspections. The reviews and inspections may be performed by the Municipality or the State depending on the agreement made between the two agencies. This will be determined upon registration of the project with the State.

Q4 Who has jurisdiction to enforce the code?

A4 Usually it is the municipality, occasionally the State. The Architect will guide you through this process and determine which agencies will require reviews of the project.

Q5 When should the code evaluation start?

A5 Code evaluation should begin at the start of design with a suggested review with the code official during the design process. This review will give the code official an understanding of the project prior to submittal for final approval. Architects prepare drawings and specifications on behalf of the owner. These documents are reviewed by the authority having jurisdiction concerning the application of the zoning ordinances and building codes.

Q6 What is the difference between a Municipal Zoning Ordinance and the State Building Code?

A6 Municipal Zoning Ordinances govern land use, setbacks, building heights, materials and other general planning and development issues. The State Building Code regulates everything pertaining to the design and construction of buildings and structures, and movement, alterations, repairs, demolition and removal of existing buildings and structures.

Q7 What is the role of the building code official?

A7 The building code official has the authority to interpret and enforce code provisions, and perform plan review and approval. If the applicant's interpretation is different from the official's there is an appeal process available to the applicant. This process is outlined in the Administration Section of the building code.

Q8 What costs are incurred through the code review process?

A8 Costs vary depending on the jurisdiction. There may be fees for plan reviews and/or building permits. Contact should be made with the local jurisdiction to determine what costs are applicable to your project.

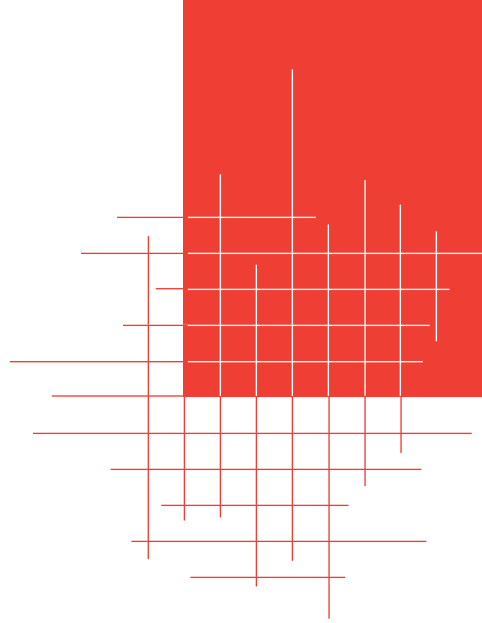
Q9 Is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) part of the building code?

A9 Yes and no, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a Federal law governed and enforced by the United States Justice Department and in itself, is not a "code." Those portions of the ADA that deal with site access and the built environment have been incorporated into the International Building Code (IBC) and Minnesota State Building Code with some modifications. The local building official is responsible for the enforcement of the building code, not the ADA.

Q10 Should we ever exceed the minimum code requirements for a building?

A10 Codes are the minimum requirements. Exceeding the code may help the owner in some instances. The architect can recommend what would be in your best interest.





Additional Resources

AIA Book Store — aia.org/bookstore

State of Minnesota website — doli.state.mn.us/buildingcodes.html

AIA Minnesota Building Code Committee website — aia-mn.org/committees/building_codes.cfm



American Institute of Architects
Minnesota
275 Market Street, Suite 54
Minneapolis, MN 55405
612-338-6763
www.aia-mn.org

