

7. Building Code Training Program

The state building code system, first established in 1974, was overhauled in 1998 to improve its effectiveness. The Legislature recognized the effectiveness of the Florida Building Code depended on the various participants' knowledge of the codes. The Building Code Training Program was intended to improve compliance and enforcement by providing a focus for code-related education through coordination of existing training resources, including those of universities, community colleges, vocational technical schools, private construction schools and industry and professional associations.

Historically, the division of responsibilities and authority among statutorily independent agencies has limited the implementation of a successful training program on the Florida Building Code. Currently, the statutes parcel training on the Florida Building Code among the Building Code Education and Outreach Council, Department of Community Affairs, Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Florida Building Commission, and professional licensing boards. While the intent was to bring all parties together for consensus decisions, the parceling of responsibilities has created an extremely divisive, inefficient and nonproductive process.

Florida Building Commission/Department of Community Affairs

The Commission developed the Code “core curricula” courses, which all licensees must take once, with additional courses to be developed by educational institutions and private sector training providers. The licensing boards approve these “advanced” topics courses through their general continuing education approval programs. To assist the boards, and to comply with the Commission’s oversight responsibilities for code education, the Commission created an electronic Course Accreditation Program to review advanced building code courses developed by private providers for compliance with the Florida Building Code and its processes. The Commission approves “course accreditors,” individuals with expertise in the Florida Building Code, to review the courses and ensure 100% compliance with the most current edition of the Florida Building Code. After the course has been reviewed by the accreditor and approved by the Commission, the provider receives an electronic approval, which is then submitted to the Department of Business and Professional Regulation as part of the continuing education course application process.

Since its original implementation in March 2002, the Florida Building Code has undergone extensive revisions each year to address hurricane, glitch, and legislative issues. The revisions, coupled with course approval administrative processes, have negatively impacted the ability of course providers to deliver training courses on the most current code in a timely manner. See the Commission proposal to eliminate the annual amendment process in Section ____ of the Report.

Department of Business and Professional Regulation/Licensing Boards

The licensing boards are mandated to adopt the specific number of hours in specialized or advanced courses their licensees are required to take on the Florida Building Code. The majority of the boards initially adopted “zero” as the number of required hours. After the Joint Administrative Procedures Committee challenged “zero” as a number, and consistent with the Legislature’s intent, the boards then adopted rules to require “one” or “two” hour(s) of training on the Florida Building Code each license renewal cycle.

Continuing education courses, including advance courses on the Florida Building Code, are approved for three (3) years by the licensing boards. . The Commission requires all advance courses be updated and accredited to comply with the latest version of the Code, including all updates and revisions that address glitches or Legislative mandates. The licensing boards rely on the continuing education providers to update other Code-related courses, but do not actively ensure the Code-related courses are updated until the three-year expiration date. Since the advance Code courses approved by the Commission represent only a small portion (1/14) of the number of continuing education hours, there is reason to be concerned about how courses, other than those approved by the Commission, impact the construction industry on a day-to-day basis. Do the providers update the outdated course material? Based on the outrage exhibited by providers when informed they would be required to update the advance courses, the answer is “no.” If these courses are not being updated to the current adopted Code, how and when are licensees trained on the new requirements? Are implementation and enforcement of new codes delayed in some jurisdictions until the outdated continuing education courses expire?

Building Code Education and Outreach Council

The Building Code Education and Outreach Council, composed of representatives of the licensing boards, Florida Building Commission, Office of the State Fire Marshal, and K-12 public school construction was created to break the five-year impasse that existed on code training. The intent was to discuss substantive issues that impacted all parties at the Council and forward Council recommendations to the individual boards and Commission for action. Unfortunately, the same turf issues that had restricted the Commission from developing an effective program were brought forth to the Council.

The statutory requirement to submit advance courses through both the Florida Building Commission and individual licensing boards for review and action has extended the course approval time frame an additional 4-6 weeks, depending on the Commission and Board meeting schedules, for original applications.

Recommendations:

Place the sole authority and responsibility for training on the Florida Building Code under one entity. The current parceling of authority and responsibility makes everyone, and no one, accountable for an effective training program.

