

The Relationship Between Codes and Standards

The following provides an overview of the relationship between codes and standards in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Developed by UL Standards C&S Task Force (2022): Task Group: Laura Werner, Randi Myers, and Dave Mercier

Introduction

Codes include minimum installation requirements and will typically rely on referenced standards for specific product details not included in the code. These referenced safety standards then can be used to certify a product. The following provides a general overview of codes and standards and the people that develop and enforce them to aid stakeholders in determining if a proposal should be submitted to a code or standard to address a specific safety issue.

Stakeholders

Committees comprised of stakeholders representing users, producers, regulators, general interests, and consumer groups develop safety codes and standards to define the minimum safety requirements for installations and equipment. To have an open, balanced and multisectoral process, the Dirección General de Normas (DGN), Standards Council of Canada (SCC), and American National Standards Institute (ANSI) have guidelines for technical committees. These guidelines ensure participation from relevant interest categories and stakeholders in the technical committees responsible for codes and standards development. These stakeholders can provide insights into the relationship between a code requirement and its referenced standard.

Codes

Codes are minimum installation/construction requirements consisting of rules, suggested practices, or recommendations. Codes are not law, but they can become law when adopted by local, state, provincial, or national governments and are enforceable, with consequences for non-compliance. Codes are sometimes locally amended to meet regional needs before being adopted into law as part of that jurisdiction's official building, energy, electrical, or fire code.

Standards

Standards set expert, detailed procedures for the specialized item's construction, materials, manufacture, testing, or installation instructions. Standards referenced in codes provide a direct link to the requirements for product features and testing requirements. When an adopted code references a standard, that standard becomes enforceable by law.

Enforcement

The local authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) acts as the enforcement arm of adopted codes and their referenced standards. The AHJ may be a federal, state/provincial/territorial, local, or other regional department or individual such as fire chief; fire marshal; chief of a fire prevention bureau, labor department, or health department; building official; electrical inspector; or others having statutory authority. NFPA codes classify the AHJ as "an organization, office, or individual responsible for enforcing the requirements of a code or standard, or for approving equipment, materials, an installation, or a procedure."

Conclusion

Codes establish a means for regulation for safe buildings and equipment installations. A code cannot readily address the precise details for construction methods and materials, resulting in the complementary need for standards. With a basic understanding of the relationship between codes and standards, a stakeholder can better understand if a proposal should be submitted to a code or standard to address a specific safety issue.

References:

- [NFPA About Codes and Standards](#)
- [NFPA Fact Sheet Referenced Standards](#)
- [CODES AND STANDARDS: American Society for Nondestructive Testing](#)
- [Building Codes and Standards 101: Rockwool](#)
- [US Building Code – ICC Standards Guide](#)
- ["Engineering Progress, The Inspiring Story of Underwriters Laboratories"](#)