

Building Inspectors: The Silent Defenders

by Tony Falcone

Nowhere will you find a museum, monument, statue or even a plaque honoring the heroic efforts of our building inspectors. Although they have saved countless lives over the years, most people are unaware of their silent vigil over our safety.

The fact is that a large segment of our society is complacent about building safety. How many people take it for granted that the buildings in which we live, work and shop are structurally sound and can be safely exited in the event of an emergency? We don't worry about the water coming from our faucets being contaminated, the risk of fire or electrocution when we plug-in our electrical appliances, or the possibility of getting sick due to improper ventilation systems. These examples point out just a few minimum standards that the public at large has come to assume are enforced throughout the country.

How is it that we can be so carefree about building safety? The answer is embodied by the men and women who go about their daily duties as building inspectors to ensure that minimum life, health and safety standards are followed. Their proactive and preventive enforcement of our building codes have afforded this nation a level of comfort and safety that is unmatched anywhere in the world.

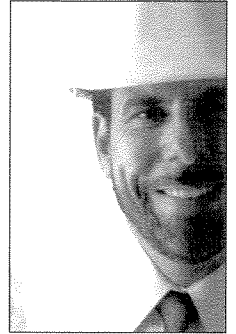
Despite this, how many of the people in our communities know what building inspectors do? Ask any elementary school student to describe the responsibilities of a firefighter or police officer and he or she will almost certainly be able to give you some sort of description, but ask about

building inspectors and you will probably get a blank stare. Are these devoted individuals any less heroic because they prevent the fires rather than extinguishing them? The difference is that one is catastrophic and newsworthy and the other unnoticed. When building inspectors are noticed, they are often considered nuisances or agents of an invasive bureaucracy.

It takes years of experience and schooling to achieve the knowledge required to become a Building Inspector. They must understand and apply thousands of ever-changing and evolving code requirements. These professionals have never been self-promoting. They don't wear recognizable uniforms or regularly visit schools to talk about building safety, but maybe they should. Then children would learn early on about *all* of the men and women who serve and protect us everyday.

If the public had the ability to realize the countless thousands of lives saved by building inspectors, they would surely honor them with the highest respect. But even if that never happens, these silent defenders will continue their dutiful sentry, as they have for over 100 years to promote and preserve life, health and safety in this country. ♦

Tony Falcone is the Building Official for the City of Agoura Hills, California.



Building Safety Week in the City of Corona, California

Each year, the City of Corona Building Department—which serves a 38 square-mile jurisdiction located approximately 45 miles southeast of Los Angeles—recognizes and promotes Building Safety Week in a number of ways.

At the first City Council meeting in April, the Mayor issues a proclamation recognizing the Building Department's role in public safety. After acknowledging the proclamation, the city's Building Official gives a brief presentation describing in greater detail the importance of the Building Department with

respect to saving lives through prevention.

The Building Department later sets up a public outreach booth outside of a local building materials and hardware retailer on the closing Saturday of Building Safety Week. Staff distribute information regarding city design standards and answer questions regarding home projects. The booth is always a great success, averaging more than 200 visitors. ♦

—submitted by City of Corona Building Official Keith Clarke