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Advocacy Group Calls on State To Update 8 Year Old Building Codes

A coalition of organizations is calling on the state to update its building codes from the current 2006 regulations.

BUILD SAFE NY, a coalition of more than two dozen organizations dealing with building construction and safety, released a statement supporting an update Tuesday.

It's a boring topic, but a change in building codes has the potential to significantly increase building safety statewide – but comes with a few strings attached.

Those strings are mostly financial. An updated set of codes means more regulations for buildings both commercial and residential. Changes must also be made to already existing buildings.

But despite the cost, supporters say the codes will improve the safety and sustainability of buildings old, and new.

“This is something that truly affects every single person,” Dottie Harris, Vice President of State & Local Government Relations for the International Codes Council, told State of Politics.

The International Codes Council is an association that creates and recommends an updated set of codes every three years. The codes are used in all fifty states in the U.S., and the District of Columbia.

While other states have stayed on track with updating their systems every three years, New York hasn't approved a new set since 2010. Even then, they instituted the 2006 codes instead of the 2009. Harris says state officials were on track to put the 2012 codes in place, but by the time they got around to it, the 2015 codes were already in the works.

The 2015 codes have since been released (yes, it's 2014 now), and according to Harris, are set to be put in place by August 2015. On behalf of the ICC, she testified at a State Fire Prevention and Building Code Council meeting today on the regulations.

It's that body – comprised of a variety of officials from a variety of disciplines and regions statewide – that will ultimately approve the regulations. Since it's an administrative function, the legislature actually has no say on whether the codes are approved or not, Harris says. They only need the nod from the council and Governor Andrew Cuomo.

And a lot has changed since 2006 that Harris says requires an update. For example, one new regulation requires flood vents in buildings statewide. Those vents are designed to prevent a total structure failure in situations like Hurricane Sandy, or just ordinary flash flooding.

“I think that's why the codes are so important, and keeping them up to date, there's always a balance,” Harris said.

That balance is the cost. Among the larger changes in the 2015 codes are regulations to improve weather preparedness, fire protection, accessibility and energy efficiency. You can see a few of the details in the PDF below.

The codes, themselves, are actually based on suggestions from the public. But, the process of choosing which codes to include isn't a walk in the park. The ICC takes a look at the cost versus the benefit of a code change, as well as the effect it may have on the environment.

Part of that analysis includes implementing a 90-day transition period between the current regulations and the new, to give property owners enough time to make necessary changes.

There is no hard deadline for the codes to be approved, but as mentioned before, August 2015 is when supporters hope to see them active.

2015 ICC Codes



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