

## No Code, No Confidence

Building code affects men, women, and children everywhere in the world. We rely on the integrity of our buildings to keep us and our families safe through everyday life as well as in times of crisis like catastrophic weather and various natural disasters. From 1792 BC to 1750 BC, King Hammurabi ruled Babylon and made the first known building code laws that were created in "an eye for an eye" fashion. Some examples of these laws are *"If a builder builds a house for someone, and does not construct it properly, and the house which he built falls in and kills its owner, then that builder shall be put to death."*, *"If it ruins goods, he shall make compensation for all that has been ruined, and inasmuch as he did not construct properly this house which he built and it fell, he shall re-erect the house from his own means."*, and *"If it kills the son of the owner, the son of that builder shall be put to death."*

Though the Hammurabi system of justice is no longer taken literally, it can be used as a standard for how seriously we need to take the responsibility of building homes and public spaces for the public. The Code of Hammurabi is one of the earliest forms of building codes known. Containing roughly 282 laws, the Hammurabi system was displayed in town for all of the citizens to see. Having codes in the wide open helped people become educated on proper building conduct, that same knowledge is lacking in today's society.

The modern-day building code has evolved immensely from the 282 laws that Hammurabi had to offer back in the day and with that, the societal understanding and involvement in building code has evolved as well. Society is no longer up to date and knowing what to expect as far as their built environment goes. The health, safety, and general welfare of the people lay heavily in the hands of those who yearn to improve the built environment around us on a daily basis.

I remember conversing with one of the residents in independent living at a local retirement home, her room shared a wall with the kitchen for the dining room and she often struggled to enjoy her apartment with the constant clatter coming from the kitchen. Dissatisfied with the noise, she complained and complained to no avail. Eventually, she convinced somebody to check it out for her and they found that the kitchen had not been equipped with the appropriate firewall. This particular wall was lined with ovens, fryers, and other high power

pieces of equipment that could cause a fire. No incidents took place but if they had, she and her apartment would not have been protected what so ever. People pay thousands of dollars a year to live in a home of their own or a retirement community, following building codes only ensures the safety of the people and even animals inhabiting these different homes.

Building codes are not always followed unfortunately and this is why people should be more educated on basic building code. I will never forget when I was around 14 years old and in classic Christmas spirit, my dad and I were last minute shopping for my mom. We found ourselves in a candle shop at the mall and as we were standing in line to pay, I asked a nearby employee where the restroom was. Instantly, I was rejected access because it was for employees only and this is where my dad stepped in saying that they weren't allowed to do that. Later, he explained to me that the stores in the mall have to have a public access bathroom if their store is a certain distance from the mall bathroom.

As citizens of Virginia, we expect to feel confident that we will be safe in our day to day lives in public and at home. Our built environment should be one that we feel comfortable and safe in, this requires the hard work of those who work endlessly to make sure that the health, safety, and general welfare is fulfilled.