



Coffee Break Training - Fire Protection Series

Administration: Reading Codes and Standards: Part 3

No. FP-2013-32 August 6, 2013

Learning Objective: The student shall be able to explain the importance of definitions.

This Coffee Break Training concludes the administrative tips on how to read and apply the model codes.

- Always read the “scoping” statement at the beginning of the chapter. This will help you understand the range of topics the chapter covers. If it’s not described in the scope, you probably are looking in the wrong chapter.
- Read the entire chapter to obtain context of the topic and its intent. Don’t “cherry pick” a code section and its reference number simply because you think it’s applicable to the situation at hand.
- Learn the difference between “global” and “chapter-specific” definitions. The definitions provided in Chapter 2 of the codes apply to the entire code or standard. Those within individual chapters apply only to that chapter. Where there are chapter-specific definitions, they are listed in the beginning of the appropriate chapter.
- Recognize how important definitions are to proper code enforcement. For example, while the dictionary may define “container” as a “receptacle for holding goods,” in the fire code it specifically means “a vessel 60-gallons or less capacity for transporting or storing hazardous materials. Pipes, piping systems, engines and engine fuel tanks are not considered to be containers.”
- “Annex” or “appendix” materials are not enforceable unless specifically adopted by the ordinance or bylaw that adopts the remainder of the code. Annex or appendix materials should be considered informative or advisory unless adopted legally.



By understanding that these flammable liquid drums are defined as “containers,” the code official can apply the appropriate controls.

Code reading, interpretation and application are some of the most important skills that an inspector brings to the job. Anyone can read the text of a book and enforce it verbatim with the authority he or she possesses as a code enforcement official. It is, however, a challenge for some to consider the nuanced interpretation of the regulations. The appropriate use and application of these rules is essential to protect the public while maintaining the jurisdiction’s economic vitality.

For additional information and training on building and fire code enforcement, consider some of the fire prevention courses within the technical curriculum at the National Fire Academy (<http://1.usa.gov/14XhC2i>).



Eligible for Continuing Education Units (CEUs)
at www.usfa.fema.gov/nfaonline

For archived downloads, go to:

www.usfa.fema.gov/nfa/coffee-break/