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The Need for Code Compliance

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(From a letter dated March 5, 2002 in preparation for a discussion on the need for Code compliance)

Consensus Codes such as ASME, ANSI, API, NFPA, ASTM, BOCA are not mandatory in and of themselves. However, federal, state, city and other local Codes are mandatory. In these you will find regulations that establish various Standards taken from the above-mentioned Codes as legally binding requirements. In addition, insurers also require compliance with appropriate consensus Codes.

To comply with these Codes, irrespective of government regulations, doesn't cost the builder any more than if they didn't comply. It does, however, cost more to fabricate and install piping systems that have a high degree of integrity as opposed to a system that doesn't.

By hiring non-certified welders and plumbers; by-passing inspections, examinations and testing; using material that may potentially not withstand service pressures and temperatures; and supporting this type of system with potentially inadequate supports is less costly but there's too much at risk. I don't think anyone in good conscience would intentionally attempt to do something like that in order to save some money.

If anyone intending on fabricating and installing a piping system plans to:

1. Use listed material,
2. Specify material that meets the requirements for fluid service, pressure and temperature,
3. Inspect the material for MOC, size and rating,
4. Use certified welders and plumbers,
5. Inspect welds and brazing,
6. Adequately support the pipe,
7. Test the pipe for tightness.

Then they are attempting to comply with Code. The Code simply explains how to do this in a formal, well thought out manner.

There is not a sufficiently good enough reason not to comply with appropriate Codes. If there was a fee involved for compliance this might be a stimulus for debate. But there is no fee, and there is usually just too much at stake. Even with utility systems in an admin building or a lab facility, the potential damage from a ruptured pipeline, or a slow leak at an untested joint could easily overshadow any savings gained by non-compliance. That's without considering the risk to personnel.

The first thing that someone should do if they are considering to do otherwise is check local and state Code. They may find regulations that require adherence to ASME, IBC or some of the other consensus Codes. If not already, this should be a regulation within any Company's requirements.

Just a bit of trivia:

ASME published the first edition of the Boiler and Pressure Vessel Code in 1914-15. Prior to that, and what played a large part in creating this Code, between 1870 and 1910 approximately 14,000 boilers had exploded. Some were devastating to both people and property. Those numbers fell off drastically as the Code was adopted, and its requirements put into practice.

Uniformity and regulation does have its place.

END OF LETTER