



Building Code Communication Pocket Guide

FEMA P-2420

January 2025



FEMA



Table of Contents

Welcome5

Effective Communication7

Understanding Your Audience 11

Key Messages 13

Responding to Misconceptions..... 27

How to Communicate the Importance of Building Codes 39

Resources..... 43



Welcome

As a community official, your role is to inform different audiences about the importance of building codes. This Pocket Guide offers key messages to encourage the adoption, administration, implementation, and enforcement of up-to-date building codes, reducing disaster risks and protecting communities. It addresses common misunderstandings and provides effective communication strategies for conveying the value of building codes.

This Pocket Guide is not intended to answer every question about building codes, their importance, or the community and FEMA's role. It is meant to help you communicate with your community members and other stakeholders about this topic in ways that can make it relevant and better understood.



By using the messaging in this Pocket Guide, you can encourage action by connecting risk to home, businesses, schools, critical facilities, and many more that matter most to people in the community.





Effective Communication

Communicating the importance of building code adoption and enforcement effectively to the community allows them to realize that natural hazards will not stop, and they are not immune from disasters. Helping people realize the potential impact of natural hazards is crucial for fostering awareness, preparedness, and resilience.

! Clear communication builds trust, minimizes the risk of misunderstandings and misinterpretation, and contributes to the success of products and services. Clear communication helps convey thoughts, ideas, and information in a way that others can easily comprehend.

Clear and concise communication is vital for good community relations. It ensures that all relevant information is available, audiences are informed, and decisions are accepted. *This Pocket Guide is not a script, you should:*

- Tailor messages to fit your community's needs.
- Understand that knowing your audience's background and expectations is essential when creating materials about building codes for community engagements.





When preparing for tough conversations about the importance of building codes, identify your audience and their technical knowledge. Focus your messages to resonate with their priorities. Use this Pocket Guide to prepare for complex questions and build common ground.



For **social media content**, keep messages simple and include a clear call to action. Inform the community about building code updates, upcoming events, or preparation steps for new regulations, and highlight information that supports vulnerable populations.

In **written materials**, such as letters or fact sheets, consider your audience. Use key messages as themes and tailor additional points to resonate with their concerns.

For more information on methods to communicate the importance of building codes, go to page 39.

KEYS TO BUILDING STRONG CONNECTIONS



Actively Listen:

Focus on the speaker, show understanding.



Build Trust:

Be consistent in your actions and words.



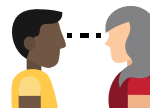
Show Empathy:

Acknowledge concerns and emotions.



Share Knowledge:

Be clear and confident without being confrontational.



Use Positive Body Language:

Maintain eye contact, open posture.



Stay Confident:

Confidence influences and persuades.



Understanding Your Audience

In this Pocket Guide, key audiences are categorized into three groups:



General Public

This section focuses on the people living in your neighborhood. The residents here come from all walks of life, making this a wide-ranging category. While we acknowledge the presence of additional groups, such as faith-based and nonprofit organizations, the messages aimed at the general public in this Pocket Guide break down technical ideas into easy-to-understand terms, emphasizing practical steps individuals can take to safeguard themselves.



Decision Makers

These are your elected officials, the leaders of municipal departments, or others within the community who decide about spending and implementing policies. Messages flagged for this audience are focused on taking wider community actions or investing community resources.



Homebuilders

These professionals ensure that designs comply with relevant building codes and standards. They play a crucial role in interpreting and applying building codes to specific projects. These are the individuals or companies that execute construction projects. They must follow building codes and obtain permits to ensure safety, quality, and compliance.



Key Messages

This Pocket Guide features **key messages** crafted to highlight the importance of adopting, administering, implementing, and enforcing up-to-date building codes.

These messages serve as foundational points for educating different audience types on the **critical role building codes play in reducing disaster risks and protecting communities**.

Each key message in the gray box is supplemented by further details below it for each audience type. These supporting facts address common misunderstandings, offering clear and effective approaches to communicate the value of building codes.

This multi-tiered approach equips users with messaging that resonates with various perspectives ensuring a **widespread understanding** and **fostering support** for **resilient, safe communities**.



We value our families and the safety of our homes and neighborhoods in addition to the well-being of our community. By knowing our risk from natural hazards, we can make **smarter decisions** in being **stronger, safer**, and **more adaptable** with modern building codes.



Modern **building codes are designed to protect everyone**, regardless of where you live or work. From home renovations to new buildings, up-to-date codes are carefully crafted to reduce risks and create safer spaces for all.



You don't have to be an expert to understand the codes! Consider using tools like **Inspect2Protect** (<https://inspecttoprotect.org/>) wherever you are to be **aware of the adopted building codes in the area**.



Investing in up-to-date building codes is an **investment in the future of our communities**. Implementing modern building codes enhances safety, strengthens economic resilience, lowers recovery costs after disasters, and attracts new development.



Effective code enforcement and community engagement drive safer outcomes. Easy access to tools like **Inspect2Protect** **foster trust and transparency, empowering residents** to actively **support** and **understand safety initiatives**.



Building to code means building smarter, safer homes that withstand the test of time. By following modern building codes, you're not only protecting future homeowners but also **reinforcing the value of your work** and **reputation**.



Up-to-date codes mean **greater peace of mind** for you and your clients.



Knowing that you've met or exceeded the latest safety standards **instills confidence** in both you and the homeowner, **demonstrating a commitment to quality and safety**.



Utilize tools like **Inspect2Protect** to stay informed on the latest code requirements. Accessing resources that simplify complex regulations helps **ensure compliance** and offers a trusted reference for your clients, showing that you **prioritize their safety and satisfaction**.



Home Inspection

When you're arranging a home inspection, be sure to **ask about the year your home was built** and its **alignment with local building codes**. This information will help you identify any necessary safety upgrades, ensuring your home is better protected against potential hazards.

By implementing and enforcing modern building codes as a proactive measure you are **saving lives, money, and reducing the strain on the community.**



Modern building codes mean fewer injuries, deaths, and losses during natural disasters, so **adopting them is a crucial way to protect your loved ones** and your investment in your home.



Although it may seem like an upfront cost, modern codes **reduce long-term costs for repairs and insurance by minimizing damage from hazards.** Remember that when disaster strikes, the cost of repairs will be significantly lower.



Adopting modern codes ensures that **critical infrastructure** – such as roads, utilities, hospitals, and schools – **remains operational after a disaster**, maintaining community cohesion and economic stability.



Investing in modern building codes is a **long-term cost-saving measure** for the community, reducing damage-related expenses, emergency response, and rebuilding after disasters.



Building hazard-resistant homes shows clients you **prioritize their safety**, enhancing your reputation as a **builder committed to quality and resilience.**



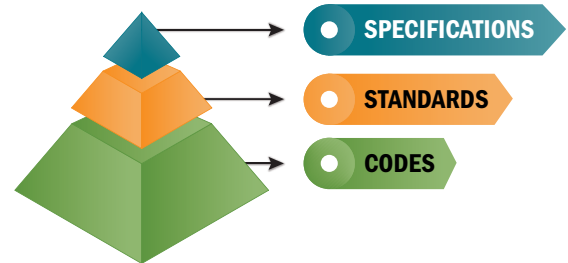
Homes built to modern standards are more valuable. They offer **better protection and lower insurance costs**, which are highly **attractive selling points for homeowners.**



Adhering to updated codes **reduces liability risks in case of a disaster**, as structures are more resilient to hazards. This reflects positively on your craftsmanship and foresight.



What's The Difference?



SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications provide detailed instructions from designers, architects, or engineers regarding materials and methods needed to meet project goals and comply with codes and standards, including blueprints for custom materials and unique installation techniques.

STANDARDS

Standards are consensus-based guidelines that define building codes and technical criteria for materials, design methods, and construction practices. Examples include ASCE 7 (load design) and ASTM International (material performance).

CODES

Codes are legal requirements that ensure minimum standards for public health, safety, and welfare in construction. They cover aspects like structural integrity, fire safety, and accessibility, with key examples including the International Building Code (IBC) and the International Residential Code (IRC).

We have a **responsibility to our community to plan for the long term**. During calm times, we should consider how our community can grow resiliently. There are numerous ways we can collaborate to achieve this.



Investing in safer, stronger buildings today protects our families and community for tomorrow. **Modern codes ensure our homes and structures are more resilient**, meaning less damage and disruption for families during extreme events. Building for the future now is a **collective step toward a safer community**.



Resilient communities **recover faster** and experience **fewer setbacks after disasters**. When we choose stronger building standards, we're not only securing our homes but also contributing to a quicker recovery that benefits everyone, keeping our schools, businesses, and services running smoothly.



Long-term community growth depends on adopting resilient building practices now. Building codes that include the latest advances set the stage for **long-term community development**, ensuring that infrastructure can **support future needs** and **withstand emerging risks**.



Resilient building codes are foundational to economic stability and growth. Communities that adopt and enforce up-to-date building codes **attract investment** and **create jobs**, demonstrating to businesses and residents alike that they are **forward-thinking and resilient**.



Encouraging a proactive approach to resilience reduces the economic and human costs of disasters. Implementing stronger codes and planning for the long term **reduces the need for costly repairs** and **disaster aid**, which protects public funds and **ensures a quicker return to normalcy** after adverse events.



Building resiliently is good business. Homes built to modern codes are **more likely to withstand the elements, enhancing customer satisfaction** and **reducing costly post-disaster repairs**. Customers appreciate homes that offer peace of mind and long-term value.



Resilient construction today means lower repair and maintenance costs tomorrow. Building to high standards now **reduces the need for costly repairs down the line**, saving clients money over time and boosting your reputation as a quality builder focused on client well-being.





BCAT Fact Sheets

Using Building Codes Adoption Tracking (BCAT) data, FEMA creates fact sheets annually summarizing building code adoption across states and territories, organized by FEMA regions. These sheets highlight amendments that weaken codes. You can find updated fact sheet and learn more about FEMA's BCAT Portal at <https://go.dhs.gov/Ubw>.





Updated codes not only improve safety but often incorporate building practices that **increase the building efficiencies** while **improving resilience** to natural hazards.

 Modern codes often include standards that help homeowners **reduce utility costs**.

 Resilient communities are attractive to businesses seeking stability. By adopting sustainable codes, communities **foster an environment of economic security and growth**.

 Implementing sustainable building codes helps communities meet environmental targets, demonstrating a **commitment to responsible governance and long-term resilience planning**.

 Homes and buildings built to sustainable codes are increasingly valued by buyers who prioritize efficiency, **giving builders a competitive edge**.

 Sustainable codes take into account the increasing frequency and severity of natural hazards, **helping builders anticipate regulatory changes and prepare for future market demands**.

Parent Codes



Companion Codes¹



Fire

IFC

NFPA 1

Plumbing

IPC

UPC

Mechanical

IMC

UMC

Fire

IECC

Referenced Standards & Specifications²



¹Companion Codes are selected from a larger group of code types
²Standards & Specifications are selected from a larger group of standards and specifications

Codes get better over time. We learn from past disasters and technological advances, making adopting the most up-to-date building code the ideal recommendation.



Up-to-date building codes are designed to protect us against the hazards we face today. **New codes account for the latest scientific research and disaster data**, helping keep our homes, schools, and workplaces safer from the natural hazards that affect our community.



Safer buildings start with stronger codes. Every update to the code reflects lessons learned from past events, meaning your home will be **better prepared to withstand today's challenges, reducing risks** to your family and property.



Adopting current codes demonstrates leadership in community resilience and public safety. By committing to the latest codes, you show a **proactive approach to safety** that reassures residents and **strengthens community confidence** in local governance.



Current building codes reflect both innovation and lessons learned from real-world disasters. Every **code update is based on research and analysis of recent events**, incorporating best practices that can help prevent future loss of life and reduce recovery costs.



Building to the latest code standards makes your work a lasting investment in quality and safety. Updated codes incorporate the latest materials and methods, **ensuring that the buildings you create can withstand time and extreme events**, enhancing your reputation for quality craftsmanship.



Staying current with building codes means staying at the forefront of construction excellence. By adopting new codes, you're using cutting-edge materials and technology that lead to **stronger, more efficient buildings**, appealing to clients who prioritize safety and resiliency.



Each code revision reflects what experts have learned from past disasters. Building to the latest standards shows your commitment to quality, helping your **clients feel safe and secure in their new homes**.



Building Code Adoption Checklist

Local government officials can use the **Building Code Adoption Checklist for Jurisdictions** in Module 7 of the Building Code Playbook Video Series on FEMA's Youtube Channel (<http://youtu.be/juJfMG1Dq5A>).



Local governments have a responsibility to **protect their citizens** to the best of their ability, which includes enacting policies that reduce preventable damage from known hazards.



Community leaders have a duty to protect residents from known risks. Adopting modern building codes reflects a **commitment to making homes, schools, and workplaces safer from natural hazards**.



Prioritizing policies that address known hazards **shows respect and care for future generations**, creating a safer community for children, families, and elderly residents.



Implementing and enforcing building codes that address known hazards **demonstrates accountability and commitment to community welfare, fostering public trust**.



Preventing damage from natural hazards **reduces strain on public resources**, such as emergency services and recovery funds, making these resources available for other vital needs.



Proactively reducing risks through policy **reflects a leadership commitment to high ethical standards**, showing that community well-being is prioritized over cost-cutting.



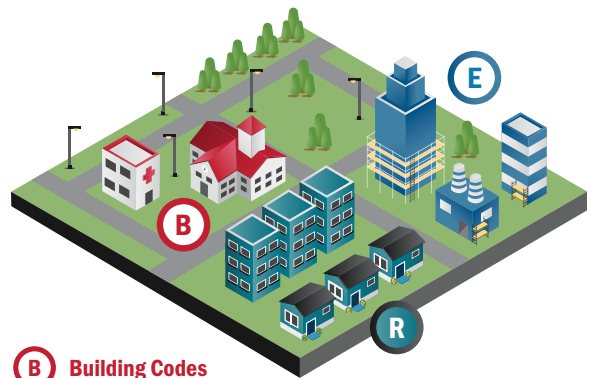
Constructing safe, hazard-resistant buildings is not only a business decision but an **ethical commitment to clients**, ensuring they are protected in their homes and businesses.



By building to the latest standards, homebuilders **reinforce community values of safety and responsibility**, making them trusted contributors to community well-being.



Governance Through Adoption



Building Codes

Codes like the International Building Code and NFPA 5000 guide construction and safety practices for commercial and larger structures (hospitals, schools, etc.) when adopted and enforced.



Residential Codes

Codes like the International Residential Code and NFPA 5000 guide construction and safety practices for residential buildings (one- and two-family dwellings) and townhouses up to three stories.



Existing Codes

Codes like the International Existing Building Code and NFPA 5000 guide a number of key aspects dealing with existing buildings (alteration, repair, maintenance, additions, changes of occupancy, historic buildings, relocation are just some). Note: The International Building Code covers a few existing building code details.



Responding to Misconceptions

MISCONCEPTION #1

"Building Codes are unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles."



THE REALITY

Building codes are essential for ensuring the safety, health, and welfare of occupants.

They prevent dangerous construction practices that could lead to substandard buildings tied to safety issues that emerge right away or years into the future.

MISCONCEPTION #2

"Building Codes are overly complicated and hard to follow."



THE REALITY

Building codes are detailed to cover a wide range of scenarios and ensure comprehensive safety standards.

Building Code Officials are trained in making sure the construction complies with the codes in place. Resources and training are available to help builders stay up-to-date with regulations.



Unchanged Costs

In Oklahoma, strengthening building I-Codes in 2014 had **no effect on price or sales of homes** despite contrary predictions.



MISCONCEPTION #3

"I don't need to bring my dwelling up to code. My insurance will cover all the damage cost."



THE REALITY

Relying solely on insurance instead of adhering to building codes is risky for several reasons:

Safety Hazards: Codes ensure buildings are safe. They are minimum standards. Ignoring them can endanger lives.

Insurance Limitations: Many policies won't cover damage due to non-compliance with codes, potentially leaving huge out-of-pocket expenses.

Increased Costs: Future insurance premiums may skyrocket, or coverage could be denied altogether if it's found that the dwelling doesn't meet required standards.

Legal and Resale Issue: Failing to comply with codes can lead to fines or legal action. Plus, it may negatively impact the property's resale value or marketability.

MISCONCEPTION #4

"DIY Projects Don't Need to Follow Building Codes."



THE REALITY

Homeowners doing their own construction or renovations are still required to follow building codes and often need permits and inspections.

Resilient Savings

The Florida Building Code reduced windstorm losses by up to 72%,

yielding a savings of \$5 for every \$1 spent,
with a payback period of about ten years.



MISCONCEPTION #5

"Implementation of Building Codes is too expensive and increases housing costs."



THE REALITY

While compliance with building codes can increase upfront costs, these regulations prevent costly repairs and legal liabilities and ensure the long-term durability and safety of buildings. Over time, the benefits and savings from reduced maintenance to increased safety often outweigh initial expenses. The additional cost of the building features (roof tie-downs, window protection, strengthened walls and roof coverings, etc.) is on average, less than 2% of total construction costs.

The cost of not adopting building codes could be fatal. The annual average savings based on losses avoided (building and content damages) due to adopting natural hazard-resistant building codes are \$484 million for floods, \$60 million for earthquakes, and \$1.1 billion for hurricane winds. (Building Codes Save: A Nationwide Study of Loss Prevention | FEMA.gov)

MISCONCEPTION #6

"Disasters don't affect me!"



THE REALITY

According to FEMA's National Risk Index ([fema.gov/nri](https://www.fema.gov/nri)), virtually 100% of the nation has been exposed to natural hazards. Unfortunately, nobody is immune to natural hazards, regardless of their location.

Building safety has become even more critical in the face of tornadoes, wildfires, and earthquakes. It is vital for everyone, and current building codes help prevent loss of life.

MISCONCEPTION #7

"Older Buildings are exempt from new codes!"



THE REALITY

While existing buildings may not need to be retrofitted to meet new codes, any renovation, addition, or significant repair typically requires compliance with current codes. There are also specific situations where even older buildings must be brought up to current standards for safety reasons.

Mitigation Saves

Every dollar spent building above 2015 I-Codes



saves approximately \$4
in post-disaster repair costs.

MISCONCEPTION #8

"Code updates are just a way to sell new materials and products."



THE REALITY

Revisions to building codes significantly improve building resilience. When updated building codes are adopted, many jurisdictions can save millions of dollars by avoiding significant losses and safeguarding personal property and other valuables.

After all, code updates are driven by new research, technological advancements, and lessons learned from past incidents to improve safety and efficiency.

While they may introduce new materials and methods, the primary goal is to enhance building standards.

MISCONCEPTION #9

"Contractors always know and follow building codes."



THE REALITY

While professional contractors are generally knowledgeable about building codes, mistakes or intentional shortcuts can happen. Property owners need to be informed and involved in the construction process to ensure compliance.

Build Smart, Pay Less

Communities with exemplary Building Code Effectiveness Grading Schedule classifications often benefit from



**lower insurance
premiums**

reflecting the reduced risk associated with well-enforced, modern building codes.

MISCONCEPTION #10

"Building Codes stifle creativity, innovation, and customization."



THE REALITY

Building codes set minimum safety standards but do not prevent innovation or customization. Codes provide a framework to ensure safety and performance without hindering innovative design.

Builders can still create unique customized designs within the framework of safety standards.

MISCONCEPTION #11

"Builders know best. Codes are unnecessary for experienced professionals."



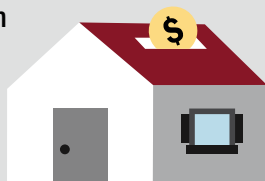
THE REALITY

Even experienced builders can make mistakes or take shortcuts without oversight.

Building codes ensure a standardized level of safety and quality, protecting both builders and consumers.

💡 Construction Cost Savings

I-Codes updates from 2015 to 2018 demonstrate construction cost savings in many areas. According to one report, these savings can be about



**\$100 TO \$600
PER HOUSE**

💡 Elevate to Protect

Flood insurance claims of elevated homes built to modern codes were about

95% LOWER

than non-elevated homes after Hurricane Harvey.





How to Communicate the Importance of Building Codes

Effectively communicating the adoption of building codes to the public is crucial for ensuring compliance, understanding, and cooperation. Below is a variety of ways to spread the word in your community and drive home the importance of codes.

Public Awareness Campaigns.

Launch a comprehensive public awareness campaign to inform the community about the adoption of new building codes. Use various media channels such as newspapers, radio, television, social media, and community bulletin boards to reach a wide audience.



Public Meetings and Workshops. Organize public meetings and workshops to engage with the community directly. Provide detailed information about the benefits of adopting building codes, the reasons behind the changes, and how it enhances safety and resilience. Allow for questions and discussions to address concerns. Often firehouses and libraries are places commonly used to hold public meetings within the community. City Hall or community centers are also another great place, in addition to schools and recreation centers. It depends on your needs so plan accordingly.



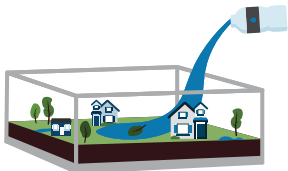
Provide Informational Materials. FEMA has a variety of resources such as brochures, flyers, and publications that explain the key points of adopting modern building codes. At your public meetings provide these as takeaways to attendees. Create a dedicated section on the local government's website with detailed information about the adopted building codes. Include FAQs, guides, and resources that residents, builders, and developers can access easily.



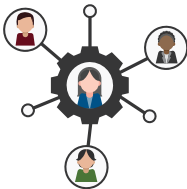
Social Media/Local Media Engagement. Utilize social media platforms to share information about building codes. Regularly post updates, infographics, and videos to engage the community. Encourage residents to share information with their networks to increase reach. Work with local media outlets to cover stories about the adoption of building codes. Arrange interviews with experts, officials, or community leaders to discuss the importance and impact of the codes on public safety and infrastructure.




Interactive Workshops and Demonstrations. Host interactive workshops or demonstrations that showcase the practical aspects of building code compliance. This could involve showcasing resilient building materials, construction techniques, or simulations of how structures can withstand various hazards.




Stakeholder Engagement. Collaborate with local businesses, homeowners' associations, and other stakeholders to reinforce the importance of building code adoption. Their support can amplify the message and facilitate widespread compliance.



By employing a combination of these strategies, local authorities can effectively communicate the adoption of building codes, foster understanding within the community, and encourage a culture of safety and compliance.

 **Pocket Fact: Community Viability**

It is estimated that **40% - 60% of small businesses do not reopen** after a flood or hurricane, which affects the overall viability of a community.





Resources

The **Building Codes Adoption Playbook for Authorities Having Jurisdiction (FEMA P-2196)** (<https://go.dhs.gov/UbT>) can provide crucial insight into ensuring local authorities comprehend and implement effective building codes. These codes bolster safety, resiliency, and compliance in construction practices.



Reading about **FEMA's funding opportunities** for building codes (<https://go.dhs.gov/3hy>) is essential for state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to obtain financial support for enhancing infrastructure resiliency and implementing effective building code enforcement.



In addition, officials should know their **State Hazard Mitigation Officer (SHMO)** (<https://go.dhs.gov/3ht>) because SHMOs are essential resources for understanding and implementing hazard mitigation strategies, securing funding for mitigation projects, and coordinating state and federal efforts to reduce disaster risks.



Studies like **NIBS' Mitigation Saves** (<https://bit.ly/MitigationSaves>) and FEMA's Building Codes Save (<https://go.dhs.gov/37k>) provide readers with data-driven insights demonstrating the significant economic and safety benefits of investing in mitigation strategies and up-to-date building codes to reduce the impact of natural hazard events.





The **Building Science Helpline**

provides free expert guidance on building codes, construction standards, and hazard mitigation practices, helping ensure safer, more resilient communities and compliance with the latest regulations. You can contact the helpline via email (FEMA-BuildingScienceHelp@fema.dhs.gov) or 866-927-2104.



The **Building Science Success Story** (<https://go.dhs.gov/374>)

webpage provides valuable information on how building science and building codes have positively impacted individuals and communities across the country.



For more resources, please visit:



fema.gov/building-science



FEMA