

25 7/1/95 ✓

LOG OF MEETING

DIRECTORATE FOR ENGINEERING SCIENCES

SUBJECT: National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Code Committee Meeting to Consider New Proposals; NFPA-73, Residential Electrical Maintenance Code for One- and Two-Family Dwellings.

DATE OF MEETING: 3/22-23, 1995

PLACE: Pan-Pacific Hotel
San Diego, CA

DATE OF ENTRY: 3/28/95

SOURCE OF ENTRY: Dennis McCoskrie *DM* ESEE

COMMISSION ATTENDEES: Dennis McCoskrie, ESEE

NON-COMMISSION ATTENDEES: See Attached Meeting Roster

SUMMARY OF MEETING:

The stated purpose of this meeting was to vote on proposals to change NFPA-73, which was first issued in January of 1994. These proposals have been submitted by electrical inspectors, home inspectors and others concerned with safety inspections and repairs to older homes' electrical wiring. This meeting is the first step in the revision process, which is expected to be on a three-year cycle, like the National Electrical Code (NEC).

Partly because new members have been added to this committee since its last meeting in May, 1993, the beginning of the meeting was devoted to reviewing the history of the committee's origins and actions. The discussion resulted in a vote by the committee approving a request to change the scope of NFPA-73 to delete the present exemption of manufactured homes and floating dwellings from this code. To become effective, this change would have to be approved by overseeing committees of the NFPA .

During the discussions of the twenty-eight proposals, concerns about a basic conflict were repeatedly expressed. It was noted that many additions and improvements seem desirable to strengthen the safety impact of NFPA-73. Many committee members expressed concern, however, that no "authority having jurisdiction"¹ has yet legally adopted this code, even though some jurisdictions have started consideration of adoption.

¹"Authority having jurisdiction" is a term employed by the electrical code and enforcement community to represent the many different governmental bodies and other inspection agencies exercising jurisdiction over electrical installations.

✓

Further, concern was expressed that broadening the coverage of the code would be viewed as increasing the cost of performing the inspections and the corrective repairs and so increasing resistance to adoption.

In response to specific proposals advocating use of more precise language and requirements in NFPA-73, the committee voted to remove the terms "adequate" and "excessive" from the Definitions section and to substitute other language in parts of the code where these terms now appear.

For this and other reasons all of the proposals submitted that included mandatory references to NFPA-70, National Electrical Code, (NEC) were either rejected or amended to try to specify the intended requirements in ways that do not require reference to the NEC, which is primarily intended to govern new construction. One exception, that permits optional reference to the NEC, cites the use of tables and calculations provided in that code, to determine if the capacity of the home's electrical service is safe to supply the "computed load" calculated from the floor dimensions, ratings of dedicated circuits for major electrical appliances, and other factors.

The committee rejected the proposal submitted by a CPSC staff member. There was substantial support for testing outlet polarity and neutral-to-ground continuity with a simple inexpensive tester, if substantiation were provided to establish that these tests would materially reduce hazards. Discussion of an electrical load test with a 5% voltage-drop limit led to general agreement that few older homes, and not many newer homes, would pass this test, which is not mandatory under the NEC. Opinions were expressed that severe voltage drops indicate problems that may be hazardous, but that quantitative data linking load-test drop to hazards is lacking at present.

The committee requested the CPSC representative to try to obtain specific data that break down the home electrical-distribution-system fires, casualties and cost totals to portions that are attributed to manufactured homes, to floating dwellings, to multifamily homes, and to other one- and two-family dwellings. In addition, data were requested that would identify the incidence of shock and electrocution accidents associated with reversed polarity and ungrounded neutral connections in home systems.

The details of the disposition of the twenty eight submitted proposals and other proposals submitted by the committee during the meeting will be published subsequently by the NFPA. The ballots during the meeting are provisional; the recorded balloting will be conducted by mail. The CPSC representative is a non-voting member of the NFPA-73 Committee.