

Model Code Adoption in Wisconsin

The History and Process

April 21, 2020

The Alliance for Regulatory Coordination supports adoption of the International Residential Code (IRC) as the foundation of the Wisconsin Uniform Dwelling Code. We believe IRC adoption will promote the safety of Wisconsin residents while saving time and money associated with code development.

Wisconsin's History of Model Code Adoption

On July 1, 2002, the Wisconsin Commercial Building Code first adopted by reference, four companion codes to the IRC – the International Building Code, the International Energy Conservation Code, the International Fuel Gas Code and the International Mechanical Code. All developed by the International Code Council.

Prior to adoption of the ICC model codes, Wisconsin had written its own Commercial Building Code from the ground up; a practice started in 1913 – before model codes existed.

Although switching from a Wisconsin - grown Commercial Building Code, to adoption of ICC codes was a significant change for Wisconsin, it was not the first time Wisconsin utilized the expertise and national consensus reflected in national model codes and standards.

Wisconsin has a long history of adopting model codes as the foundation of state building safety codes; adopting various types and editions of model codes for more than 60 years.

Since 1957, the National Boiler Code, developed by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME), has been the foundation of the Wisconsin Boiler and Pressure Vessel Code.

Since 1972, the National Electrical Code, developed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), has been the foundation of the Wisconsin Electrical Code. And since 1983, the ASME National Elevator Code has been the foundation of the Wisconsin Elevator Code.

Model Code Adoption Process

For over 60 years, these model code adoptions have been guided by input from Wisconsin subject matter experts on dozens of advisory code committees, councils and work groups. Model codes are just what the name implies – they are models to be used by state and local governments as the starting point in code development efforts.

Wisconsin has a long history of amending model code language as the result of citizen concerns or applicable state law. In those instances, the amended language is administered in Wisconsin – not the model code language.

Due to the high quality of national model codes, Wisconsin amendments have been relatively few. For the most part, advisory committee, council, and work group members, have found model codes to be well organized and written, with sound basis and reasonable requirements.

The ARC believes that will also be the case with the IRC. We encourage Wisconsin to maintain its more than 60-year tradition of model code adoption by next adopting the International Residential Code as the foundation of the Wisconsin Uniform Dwelling Code.

The Alliance for Regulatory Coordination is a consortium of 21 organizations involved in building design, construction and regulatory services. Alliance membership consists of business, labor, advocacy, professional and governmental groups; numbering thousands of members, all committed to promoting more coordinated and efficient regulatory services for citizens and businesses of Wisconsin. Learn more about the Alliance at www.4ARC.org.