Question: As a sub-contractor to the electrical contractor, our company typically designs and installs very large fire alarm systems for industrial plants. We have recently become involved in a conflict between the fire inspector in a jurisdiction and the insurance company that provides the property insurance for the industrial plant in question.

When we received the bid documents for the fire alarm system for a new warehouse and office complex, the bid documents specified that the fire alarm system must meet the requirements of the local building code, NFPA 72-2010, National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code®, and also meet the engineering requirements and specifications provided by the insurance company that underwrites property insurance for the facility.

Subsequently, the owner supplied us with a document entitled, “Specification for Fire Protection,” issued by the insurance company based on their review of the preliminary construction drawings for this new facility. Among many very specific and very detailed requirements, these Specifications state that the fire alarm system shall provide complete coverage in accordance with NFPA 72-2010, section 17.5.3.1, using smoke detectors or heat detectors in all portions of the building not otherwise protected by an automatic sprinkler system.

In our design, therefore, we specified smoke detectors above the suspended ceiling in the office building. But, the fire inspector for the local jurisdiction has demanded that we remove these smoke detectors from the design. He has stated in writing that these detectors serve no useful purpose. When we pointed out to him that we were simply following the Specifications from the insurance company, he stated very emphatically that “he and he alone” was the Authority Having Jurisdiction, not them. He refuses to approve our design until we remove those smoke detectors. Can you help us?

Turf wars always produce some interesting, albeit annoying, circumstances when you try to provide a design that meets the requirements of the various stakeholders in a project.

First of all, to deal with the issue of who serves as the Authority Having Jurisdiction, please note the definition in Section 3.2.2 of NFPA 72-2010:

3.2.2* Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ). An organization, office, or individual responsible for enforcing the requirements of a code or standard, or for approving equipment, materials, an installation, or a procedure.

A.3.2.2 Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ). The phrase “authority having jurisdiction,” or its acronym AHJ, is used in NFPA documents in a broad manner, since jurisdictions and approval agencies vary, as do their responsibilities. Where public safety is primary, the authority having jurisdiction may be a federal, state, local, or other regional department or individual such as a fire chief; fire marshal; chief of a fire prevention bureau, labor department, or health department; building official; electrical inspector; or others having statutory authority. For insurance purposes, an insurance inspection department, rating bureau, or other insurance company representative may be the authority having jurisdiction. In many circumstances, the property owner or his or her designated agent assumes the role of the authority having jurisdiction; at government installations, the commanding officer or departmental official may be the authority having jurisdiction.

This definition seems quite straightforward. The Annex offers some additional insight into how this definition applies in a real situation by indicating quite clearly that at virtually every physical location, multiple Authorities Having Jurisdiction will have an influence on the requirements. As a fire alarm system designer, you could solve any conflict between the various AHJs by always basing your design on the most severe requirements.

Yes, the public fire authority—in this case the fire inspector—clearly serves as the public Authority Having Jurisdiction having statutory authority. But the insurance company that underwrites the fire/property insurance for this facility also serves as an Authority Having Jurisdiction—in this case, a private AHJ. In some cases, you may have upwards of four or five legitimate Authorities Having Jurisdiction on a particular project. Each of these AHJs will have an influence over the approval of your design.

Do not be dismayed by this. Rather, learn how to use your knowledge of the relevant building codes, and other codes and standards, to your advantage. You can serve a very important role in bringing the various stakeholders together. Let me say more about that later in this article. For now, let’s take a look at the specific insurance company requirement.

In this case, the insurance company has referenced NFPA 72-2010, National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code®, for “complete” coverage of smoke or heat detectors wherever automatic sprinkler protection does not exist. Section 17.5.3.1, and its related sub-sections, provides a very clear description of “total (complete) coverage.”

17.5.3.1 Total (Complete) Coverage. Where required by laws, codes, or standards, and unless otherwise modified by 17.5.3.1.1 through 17.5.3.1.5, total coverage shall include all rooms, halls, storage areas, basements, attics, lofts, spaces above suspended ceilings, and other subdivisions and accessible spaces, as well as the inside of all closets, elevator shafts, enclosed stairways, dumbwaiter shafts, and chutes.
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a complete documentation that shows how you reached your conclusions. Rely heavily on requirements of the appropriate building codes and other codes and standards, such as NFPA 72-2010, National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code®. When someone states an opinion, politely ask that person to back up his or her opinion by appropriate code or standard citations. Frequently ask the property owner to share his or her design goals. Ask the insurance company representatives to share any loss experience they may have had that will support their requirements.

In other words, act as a moderator/mediator in helping the owner make a wise decision regarding this conflict. You will find that sometimes serving as a catalyst to get all the stakeholders in the same room will serve your best interests—and, more importantly, the best interests of the building owner and all of the Authorities Having Jurisdiction.

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NEW PRODUCTS . . . Continued from page 32

TraffiCalm . . .

Radar Driver Feedback Sign is the second in a number of exciting new product launches by TraffiCalm this year that is affordably priced yet fully featured to support traffic calming demands from across America," said Jan DeSantis, Business Development Manager for TraffiCalm Systems. "The new sign will be available for shipment beginning in October, and we are certain that with the numeric, text and emoticon display capabilities, this DFB will lead the market."

TraffiCalm's fully-featured and affordably priced DFB sign features an enclosed electronic control system (ECS) that can be easily removed from the sign chassis as a complete unit for simplified installation and repair clearly making it a labor efficient and cost effective solution.

The sign display shows the speeds of approaching vehicles using amber LEDs and is designed for use in areas where speeds are expected to be 45 mph or more; however, the sign is capable of showing and recording a wide range of speeds from 5 mph to 140 mph.

In addition, the 18-Inch Radar Driver Feedback Sign face measures 36" wide by 48" high with a trim 2.75" depth and the "Your Speed" legend in 6" highway gothic font is MUTCD compliant.

"As an added benefit, the new 18-Inch Radar Driver Feedback (DFB) can also display a "SLOW DOWN" message in two lines of 8" high characters, and 18" high 'happy' or 'sad' face emoticons," added DeSantis. "This is a leading-edge and solid sign solution for highways, expressways, busy thoroughfares and work zones and comes with a three-year warranty."

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