

Balanced Fire Protection Grounded in Education: The Key to Saving Lives and Protecting Property

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As Building and Fire Codes continue to evolve, it is important for all fire protection professionals—from fire service, manufacturers, AHJ's inspectors and fire equipment distributors—to focus on life safety education first and foremost when interacting with the end-user. When conducting business, it is common to rely on the codes as a method to ensure that your customers meet minimum requirements, but today the Fire Equipment Manufacturers' Association (FEMA, The Life Safety Group) would like to look beyond that strategy and discuss an all-encompassing educational approach that should assist to teach others the value of balanced fire protection and life safety while protecting property most effectively.

Since many products provided by Fire Equipment Distributors' (FEDs) are considered "compliance"—meaning that they are, in many cases, required by an adopted Code or Statute—it is easy for a technician or a field person to assist their customer by educating them on codes. Pointing out obvious Code requirements is critical to ensure that your customer is in compliance and will avoid possible violations or citations. It is important to note that fire protection education has proven the best strategy when designing a balanced fire protection plan that is customized to meet your customer's needs based on the hazards within his building or occupancy.

Fire protection education can prove to be an effective strategy when communicating with your customer. A well-rounded educational approach that both informs the customer about the Codes, but also is far-reaching to include the life-saving benefits and value of the product(s), citing possible success

stories, case studies, and statistics about when a fire is extinguished in its early stages, will have tremendous long-term, life-saving benefits to everyone involved. While code education is valuable when communicating with your customer, balanced fire protection & life safety education needs to become the clear focus of the communication. We believe the end result will be a customer who can appreciate the true value of your products and services involving everybody in working towards a better fire protection solution and an improved understanding of fire safety.

One issue to consider when discussing Code requirements is the very nature of Code language. As you all know, the Codes are written as a minimum requirement and no Code or statute can anticipate each individual customer's specific needs or situation. When discussing Code requirements, it is important to evaluate the best "fit" for the commercial structure so that the end result is a balanced fire protection & life safety plan that will suit the occupancy at hand.

Some things to consider when conducting an evaluation of your customer's specific needs as a part of effective balanced fire protection education.

What are the hazardous areas of concern?

Does the customer's situation dictate that extinguisher cabinets would be a better fit in the long term versus mounting extinguishers on the wall?

Will the hazard be better protected with an automatic system because of its size, or lack of personnel?

Do occupant hose stations make sense?

Would a clean agent extinguisher assure less "down time" in an incident?

Are there unique circumstances in this hazard?

The Code may not provide guidance for these options, but when put in the context of a balanced plan, these fire protection educational issues may better serve your customer and their fire protection needs.

In summary, there are tremendous, long-term advantages to providing balanced fire protection education to your customer. First, fire protection education will familiarize your customer with their fire hazards and the importance of planning ahead for possible incidents. Having a balanced fire protection plan in place may prove critical to the outcome when or if disaster strikes. Ultimately, a balanced approach to fire protection will include products and services that you (FED) represent so that everything works together as a complete chain of survival. Secondly, presenting a balanced and educated strategy towards fire protection will empower users to play an active role in the identification of hazards, and in choosing the right equipment and services to fit their needs. When communicating with others, A balanced fire protection education-based approach will provide you, the fire equipment distributor, with the opportunity to design a well-rounded, fire protection solution that will most effectively save lives and protect property.

The Fire Equipment Manufacturers' Association is a non-profit trade association dedicated to balanced fire protection education. For more information about FEMA, visit www.femalifesafety.org.

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