

Would the Real Gas Code Please Stand Up

By Joseph P. Guzzo

One of the first lessons I taught apprentices was how to navigate the code. We would divide the code book into appropriate sections. There are some code books that have these dividers already built in, however the State issued codes do not. In addition, an explanation as to why and how the code book is divided is very important. You just can't hand a code book over to a student divided or not and say you're on your own. In fact even licensed plumbers with years of experience have trouble navigating the code. This has been proven to me that basic code was seldom taught for years and years. We could figure out the capacity of a cylindrical tank without a calculator. Try to find where you can use P.V.C., sadly most are lost.

One of the least understood parts of the code are the Mass. Modifications. I purposely did not use the word difficult because it's not, in fact it is simple. The problem is it must be explained, and for many it never was. So I will try to explain Mass. Modifications as simply as possible. First, the State of Massachusetts has its own Plumbing Code called 248 C.M.R. (Code of Mass. Regulations) Many States, but not all, do not have their own state code. Instead they have adopted one of the two major National Plumbing Codes. Although Massachusetts uses their own state plumbing code we do not have a state gas code. We have done like many other states have and adopted a National Gas Code. N.F.P.A. 54 (2002), and for L.P.gas N.F.P.A. 58 (2001) Those are our gas codes written by the National Fire Protection Association.

When states adopt national codes many will change certain parts or sections of the code so the code will more conform to regional conditions, other related state rules and regulations, and in some cases simple philosophies of the governing body, in this case the Mass. Plumbing Board. And that is exactly what we have done with the National Gas Code, we have modified it, called the Massachusetts Modifications. This is found in our State code 248 C.M.R. Now this may seem redundant but I must repeat, the Mass. Modifications are not our gas code, they are modifications to our gas code, get it.

Here is one example of how the Mass. Modifications work. The good news is that it is user-friendly, one of the only parts of our code that is. Let's say you needed the regulations for flexible connectors. Always, always, start with the gas code N.F.P.A. 54. Once you find the section on flexible connectors either from the table of contents or the index, read it carefully. Look at the code section number, in this case it is 8.5.1. Next always, always check your Mass. Modifications the code section numbers will be the same. In this case section 8.5.1 has been modified for Massachusetts with some very drastic changes like the maximum length allowed etc, 8 in all (a) through (h). In many other cases you will find no modifications.

It is very important to understand, especially for apprentices that will be taking the exam, that the Mass. Modifications take precedence over what is written in the National code. It is very possible that you could encounter a multiple choice question where the answer although correct in the National Code, may be different if it has been modified. Here is a good tip if you have the time. We would do it in class and it takes about an hour. Working backwards start at the beginning of the Mass. Modifications. The first modification will be 1.1.1.1(a). Then go to the National Code and find 1.1.1.1(a), right

next to the section number, to the left write “see MM” and highlight it. Now with some patience continue to go through all the modifications and marking the sections that have been modified in the National Code. Now, whenever you look up a gas code question in your National Gas Code you will see by your marking that section has been modified. Then simply refer to the modification for the correct answer.

The Mass. Modifications also contain rules. There are 25 rules unique to Massachusetts only. They are similar to our basic principles in the plumbing code. It is important to know these rules exist, and apprentices should memorize some of the major ones.

Soon all plumbers will have to attend continuing education classes. I hope that part of the curriculum will be the basics, like navigating the code book, and the history of plumbing. There are so many items that have just been forgotten or have never been taught at all. In fact many plumbers and inspectors don’t even understand the true purpose of a plumbing permit. Perhaps we can discuss that issue in the near future. If you have a comment pro or con please do not hesitate to send any suggestions. Thanks again to all my loyal readers.