



History Of The NFPA Codes and Standards-Making System

Modern fire safety codes and standards, and in particular those developed by the NFPA, trace their origins to the nineteenth-century development of automatic sprinklers. From the beginning, sprinklers performed properly as extinguishing devices; however, they were originally installed in so many different ways that their reliability was uncertain.

In March of 1895, a small group of men representing sprinkler and fire insurance interests gathered in Boston to discuss these inconsistencies. They knew that nine radically different standards for piping size and sprinkler spacing could be found within 100 miles of the city of Boston. They realized that this plumber's nightmare had to be resolved or the rate of sprinkler system failure might prove unacceptable.

This meeting took place at the Boston office of the Underwriters Bureau of New England. The meeting was hosted by Everett Crosby of that office, and was attended by the following five other individuals: John Freeman of the Factory Mutual Fire Insurance Companies (known today as Factory Mutual), Uberto C. Crosby, Chairman of the Factory Improvement Committee of the New England Fire Insurance Exchange (and Father of host Everett Crosby); W. H. Stratton of the Factory Insurance Association (renamed in later years to Industrial Risk Insurers); Frederick Grinnell of the Providence Steam and Gas Pipe Company (known today as Grinnell Fire Protection); and F. Eliot Cabot of the Boston Board of Fire Underwriters.

A series of meetings followed in 1895, and the efforts of these individuals culminated with a meeting in New York City on the 18th and 19th of March, 1896. Of true significance from this meeting was the release of sprinkler installation rules entitled: "Report of Committee on Automatic Sprinkler Protection". Eventually becoming "NFPA 13", the committee that created it was chaired by U. C. Crosby, with E. U. Crosby as the secretary, and a membership of Messrs. Anderson, Bonner, Cabot, Grinnell, and Stratton. Also included as a topic of discussion, and of even greater significance, was the creation of an association to administrate sprinklers. A separate committee was thus appointed to outline the association discussed during this latest and the previous year's meetings.

A subsequent meeting was held in New York City on November 6, 1896 at the offices of the New York Board of Fire Underwriters. Eighteen men representing a variety of stock fire insurance organization were present, including Uberto Crosby, Everett Crosby, W. Stratton, and F. Cabot, all of whom were present at the earlier original meeting in March of 1895. The meeting was called to order by Uberto Crosby, and he was subsequently elected as chair of the meeting, while Everett Crosby was elected as secretary.

Aside from the sprinkler installation rules, the Articles for a new Association were reviewed. Of the twelve Articles of the Association, Articles 2, 4, 6, 9, and 10 were amended at the meeting, and the entire set was subsequently adopted as amended. Of these, Article No. 1 is worth repeating: "This organization shall be known as the National Fire Protection Association." Based on the report of a nominating committee that was quickly assembled for the purpose, the original officers were elected as follows: President - C.C. Little, Chair of Underwriters Bureau of

Middle and Southern States; Vice President - S.F. Lawton, Inspector for the South-Eastern Tariff Association; Secretary and Treasurer - E.U. Crosby, Manager of Underwriters Bureau of New England; and Chair of the Executive Committee - U.C. Crosby, Chair of the Factory Improvement Committee of the New England Insurance Exchange.

Mr. C. C. Little, the Associations first president, had been elected to his position of prominence in absentia. His organization was represented at the November 6, 1896 meeting by William A. Stoney, and it had been agreed among all present that Mr. Little would be the right choice for president.

It was not long, however, before the Association experienced its first tribulation during its early existence. Mr. Little had been experiencing health problems, and several months after being elected President of the Association, and without having the chance to provide any meaningful participation, President Little passed away.

The positions of the officers of the Association were thus reshuffled. At the First Annual Meeting of the NFPA on the 18th and 19th of May, 1897 in New York City, Uberto Crosby was named President, Charles A. Hexamer of the Philadelphia Fire Underwriters Association was named Vice President, Everett Crosby became the Secretary-Treasurer, and W. H. Stratton of the Factory Insurance Association was named Chair of the Executive Committee. Of particular note is a portion of Uberto Crosby's report to the Association at the 1897 meeting that outlines the principles still followed by NFPA Technical Committees today:

"To bring together the experience of different sections and different bodies of underwriters, to come to a mutual understanding, and, if possible, an agreement on general principles governing fire protection, to harmonize and adjust our differences so that we may go before the public with uniform rules and conditions which may appeal to their judgment is the object of this Association."

The organizations involved in the affairs the Association today include most of the organizations that were active in 1896 and 1897, although, of course, some organization names have changed through the years based on mergers and realignments. The twenty original members of the National Fire Protection Association were:

- New York Board of Fire Underwriters
- South-Eastern Tariff Association
- Boston Board of Fire Underwriters
- Underwriters Association of the Middle Department
- Philadelphia Fire Underwriters Association
- Suburban Underwriters Association
- Insurance Association of Providence
- Board of Underwriters Allegheny County
- Underwriters Bureau Middle & Southern States
- Middle States Inspection Bureau
- New Hampshire Board of Fire Underwriters
- Western Factory Insurance Association
- Improved Risk Commission, Chicago
- Underwriters Bureau of New England
- Chicago Underwriters Association
- Factory Insurance Association
- Cleveland Board of Underwriters
- New England Insurance Exchange

St. Louis Board of Underwriters
Canadian Fire Underwriters Association

It is interesting to note the second of the original twelve articles for this new association: "Membership shall consist of Stock Fire Insurance Organizations, and representatives of such organizations, having charge of the improvement and inspection of risks." Thus, in the earliest days of the NFPA, membership was limited to Stock Fire Insurance Organizations. Yet considerable interest had been expressed by non-insurance groups (as well as insurance other than Stock Fire) toward the Association, and the Articles of the Association addressing membership were revised in 1904 at the Eighth Annual Meeting. At the time, the active membership was comprised of 38 stock fire insurance boards, and 417 individuals, most of whom were related to the stock fire insurance organizations.

The resulting changes in the rules for membership opened up the NFPA. The first organizations to join in 1904 as active members under the new rules were the Associated Factory Mutual Insurance Companies, the Factory Mutual Laboratories, and the National Electrical Contractors Association of the United States. They were soon followed by the American Water Works Association, the International Association of Fire Engineers (Fire Chiefs), the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, and the American Institute of Architects. With regard to individuals joining in 1904, Russell Grinnell and a variety of other sprinkler manufacturers and installers would join, as well as Captain J. S. Sewell of the Corps of Engineers in Washington, DC, who appears to be the first Federal Government representative. The first fire department officer was Battalion Chief W. T. Beggan of the New York City Fire Department, who joined NFPA in March 1905. In the same month, H. D. Davis, the State Fire Marshal of Ohio, joined as the first State Fire Marshal.

Despite the term "National" in NFPA sometimes seeming to imply the lack of international involvement, the first overseas members joined the Association in 1903. They were John Smith of the Sun Insurance office in London, and George Smith from an insurance office in Sydney, Australia. They were soon followed by Nicolas Sergowsky, an insurance engineer in St. Petersburg, Russia, as well as a growing list of others who were awakening to the virtues of the organization.

From the humblest of beginnings to the noblest of causes, the mission of the NFPA today, much like in its earliest days, is to reduce the burden of fire and related hazards on the quality of life. The NFPA mission today is accomplished by advocating scientifically-based consensus codes and standards, research, and education for fire and related safety issues. NFPA's National Fire Codes are developed by technical committees staffed by over 6,000 volunteers, and are adopted and enforced throughout the world. NFPA functions as a nonprofit membership organization with more than 68,000 members from around the globe, all working together to fulfill the Association's mission.

A Chronology of NFPA Committee Appointments

(*Committee had same name in 1971)

1897	Automatic Sprinklers*
	Fire Doors, Shutters and Wire Glass (Now Fire Doors and Windows)
	Hose and Hydrants (Now Fire Hose)
1898	Thermo Electric Fire Alarms (Now Signaling Systems)
	Carbonic Acid Gas Extinguishers (Now Portable Fire Extinguishers)
	Cast Iron Water Mains
1899	Fire Retardant Paint (Now Flameproofing and Preservative Treatments)
1900	Devices and Materials
	Fire Hazard of Baling Cotton
	Steel Roll Shutters
	Fire Pumps*
	Fire-proofed Wood
1901	Blower Systems*
	Municipal Fire Apparatus (Now Fire Department Equipment)
	Building Construction*
	Watchmen's Time Detectors
	Waste Cans, Refuse Barrels and Water Pails
1902	Private Fire Brigades (Now Loss Prevention Procedures and Practices)
1903	Field Practice
	Special Hazards
	Municipal Fire Alarm Systems
	Fire Records (Now Fire Reporting)
	Gate Valves
1904	Theater Construction and Protection
	Signaling Systems*
	Indicator Gate and Check Valves
1905	Standard Hose Coupling Threads
	Private Fire Service Connections to Public Water Supplies (Now Public Water Supplies for Private Fire Protection)
	High Pressure Systems for Fire Service
	Chimneys and Flues (Now Chimneys and Heating Equipment)
	Lightning Protection*
	Matches
	Non-Freezing Compounds for Portable Extinguishers
	Roof and Roofing
	Skylights
	Small Reservoirs and Valve Pits
	Watchmen
	Construction of Oil Rooms
	Steam Jets

1906	Standpipes and Outside Protection*
	Nitro Cellulose Products
	Pneumatic Conveyors
1907	Garages*
	Vaults and Safes (Now Record Protection)
	Artificial Refrigeration
	Denatured Alcohol
1908	Gravity Tanks (Now Water Tanks)
	Grain Elevators
1909	Cold Storage Warehouses
1910	Common Causes of Fires
	Fire Prevention Ordinances (Now Laws and Ordinances)
1911	Electrical*
	Electric Railway Properties
	Explosives and Combustibles (Now Chemicals and Explosives)
	Forest, Brush, and Grass Fires (Now Forest)
	Mine Fires
1912	Flash Point of Oils
1913	Public Information (Now Public Relations)
	Hose for Gasoline and Other Hazardous Fluids
	Railroad Properties
	Safety to Life*
1914	Pipe and Pipe Fittings
	Uses of Wood in Building Construction
1915	Nomenclature
1916	Membership*
	Fire and Accident Prevention Day
	High Value Districts
	Marine Fire Hazards (Now Marine Fire Protection)
	Small Hose Couplings
1917	Gases
	Flammable Liquids*
	Hazardous Chemicals
1919	Docks, Piers and Wharves (Now Piers and Wharves)
1922	Dust Explosion Hazards*
	Combustible Fibers
	Fire Prevention Week (Now Fire Prevention and Clean-up Campaigns)
1923	Protection of Records (Now Record Protection)
1924	Salvaging Operations*
1925	Pyrotechnics*
1926	Farm Fire Protection (Now Rural Fire Protection and Prevention)
	Zoning

1927	Construction Operations
	Visual Education*
1928	Paint Spraying
1929	Aviation*
1930	Spontaneous Heating and Ignition
1931	Fumigation Hazards (Now Pest Control Operations)
1933	Technical Committee Procedure (Now Technical Advisory)
1934	Static Electricity*
1935	Truck Transportation (Now Motor Vehicle and Highway Fire Protection)
1937	Trailers and Trailer Camps (Now Mobile Homes and Recreational Vehicles)
1939	Fire Protection Engineering Education
1940	Museums, Art Objects and Historic Buildings (Now Libraries, Museums and Historic Buildings)
	Finishing Processes*
	Fire Safety in Homes (Now Dwelling Fire Prevention and Protection)
	Ovens and Furnaces*
	Special Extinguishing Systems
1941	Firemen's Training (Now Fire Service Training)
1943	Explosion Venting (Now Explosion Protection Systems)
1944	Aircraft Fire Fighting
	General Storage*
1945	Public Relations*
	Places of Outdoor Assembly (Now Tents, Grandstands and Air Supported Structures)
1946	Fire Gas Research
	Magnesium
	Fire Protection for Elementary Schools
1947	Dehydrators and Driers
	Wearing Apparel*
1948	Fire Casualty Statistics
	First Aid Extinguishers (Now Portable Fire Extinguishers)
	Vaporizing Liquid Extinguishing Methods (Now Halogenated Fire Extinguishing Agent Systems)
	Fire Department Equipment*
	Hospital Operating Rooms (Now Hospitals)
	Wetting Agents
1949	Industrial Fire Problems (Now Industrial Management)
1950	Civil Fire Defense
	Combustible Metals*
	Radiation (Now Atomic Energy)
	Industrial Tractors and Lift Trucks (Now Industrial Trucks)
1951	Dry Chemical Extinguishing Systems*
	Fur Cleaning and Storage*
1953	Inert Gas for Fire and Explosion Prevention

1954	Solvent Extraction*
1955	Classification of Hazardous Locations
	Internal Combustion Engines*
1956	Fire Hazards of Materials*
1957	Cutting and Welding Practices*
	Fire Department Organization*
	Water Cooling Towers*
	Electrical Metalworking Machine Tools*
1958	Foam Water Sprinklers*
	Carbon Dioxide*
	Foam*
	Water Spray (Now Water Spray Fixed Systems)
1959	Electronic Computer Systems*
1960	Heights and Areas*
1961	Boiler Furnace Explosions*
	Protective Equipment for Fire Fighters*
	Aircraft Fuel Servicing*
1963	Exposure Fire Protection*
1964	Explosion Protection Systems*
1966	Fire Hazards in Oxygen Enriched Atmospheres*
	Fuel Gases*
	Industrial and Medical Gases*
	LP-Gas*
	Pest Control Operations*
	Halogenated Fire Extinguishing Agent Systems*
1968	Chemistry Laboratories*
1969	Electrical Equipment Maintenance*
	Rack Storage of Materials*
	Liquefied Natural Gas*
	Dwelling Fire Prevention and Protection*

This information is taken from an article published on page 97 in the May/June 1995 issue of NFPA Journal entitled "The Men Who Made the NFPA." The Chronology of NFPA Committee Appointments is taken from Percy Bugby's book, "Men Against Fire."