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May 1, 2007

**SUBJECT: Building Safety Division Procedure for Submitting
Alternate Materials and Methods / Practical Difficulties
IBC 104.11**

IBC Section 104.11. Alternative materials, design and methods of construction and equipment. The provisions of this code are not intended to prevent the installation of any material or to prohibit any design or method of construction not specifically prescribed by this code, provided that any such alternative has been approved. An alternative material, design or method of construction shall be approved where the building official finds that the proposed design is satisfactory and complies with the intent of the provisions of this code, and that the material, method or work offered is, for the purpose intended, at least the equivalent of that prescribed in this code in quality, strength, effectiveness, fire resistance, durability and safety.

QUESTION / ISSUE: During the course of design or construction of a project it may be determined that it is not possible to follow the code requirements to the letter.

CODE PROVISIONS: The International Building Code authorizes the Building Official to approve alternate materials or methods provided that the proposed design, use or operation satisfactorily complies with the intent of the code and that the method of work performed or operation is at least equivalent to that prescribed in quality, strength, effectiveness, fire resistance, durability and safety. Approvals are also subject to the approval of the Fire Chief whenever the alternate material or method involves matters regulated by the Fire Code.

PROCEDURE: The applicant must completely fill out a “Request for Alternate Materials, Design, and Methods of Construction”. The fact that an alternate material or method was approved for one project does not guarantee its “blanket” acceptance for all projects. Each submittal shall be evaluated on the conditions and merits of the request for the specific project. The information provided shall include the code requirement(s), the proposed modification(s), and the justification for the request. The applicant shall provide all supporting data, technical reports, product data sheets, drawings, sketches, and computer modeling and/or calculations that substantiate and justify their request.

Once the Building Division receives this information, a Building Plans Examiner will review it and may make any necessary recommendation(s) and/or comment(s). In order for a final decision to be made by the Building Official, he/she must determine whether or not he/she is comfortable with “making the call” by asking these questions:

- Does it meet the intent of the code?
- Is it consistent with the Department’s values and policies?
- Is it the right thing for the customer?
- Is it the right thing for the Department?
- Is it on my organizational level?

DRAFT

- Is it something that I'm willing to be accountable for?

If the answer to all of the above questions is YES, then there will be no need for further review at a higher level. If the answer to any of the above questions is NO, then the Building Plans Examiner will present the request to the Plans Exam Manager for his concurrence or denial. The Plans Exam Manager, at his/her discretion, may decide that the item be reviewed at a higher level with the Fire Marshal and/or the Fire Chief before making a final decision.

Once the final decision is made, it shall be signed with a copy to be returned to the applicant. Explanation(s) of refusal or condition(s) of acceptance as applicable shall be clearly indicated. A file copy shall be kept and distributed to the appropriate Building Safety Inspection personnel responsible for that project. It shall also be scanned into the computer and filed in KIVA with the appropriate permit(s) as a "Related Document" for future reference. The original paper copy shall be kept in the Building address file for archiving purposes.

In addition approved plans shall note on cover sheet that an alternate is being used. It shall describe the alternate and provide sufficient data for the field inspector to do their inspections.

It is most common that these types of requests occur during construction, after permits have been issued. However, in the event that a "Request for Alternate Materials, Design, and Methods of Construction," is submitted during the design stages, prior to accepting plans and issuing permits, the final "accepted" request should be included with the permit drawings, either by reference or by copy directly onto the plans, depending on the actual timeframe.