

U.S. Fire Administration / National Fire Academy

*Coffee Break Training***Topic: Historic Building Life Safety and Fire Protection**

Learning objective: The student shall be able to explain the model fire code requirements for life safety and fire protection in historic buildings.

Throughout the world, we are blessed with a cultural heritage of marvelous architectural wonders. From the ruins of the ancient Greeks and Romans to some of today's exciting new "super skyscrapers," designers, builders, architects, and engineers give us a legacy of their work.

As time goes on, though, we learn more about the life safety and fire protection risks that some of these buildings present, and we update our building and fire codes to address the challenges. These buildings often were created by craftsmen working from simple plans and rudimentary engineering calculations. How do we "go back," though, and mitigate today's life safety concerns that weren't even conceived when the building was erected?

The model building and fire codes recognize that it may be impractical to apply today's codes and technologies to buildings that were erected one or more centuries ago. They provide special consideration for buildings or structures that have been identified and classified by State or local jurisdictions as "historic" buildings.

So long as these designated historic buildings do not constitute a "distinct hazard to life or property" the code official may allow a broad range of life safety and fire protection solutions.



NFPA 1, *Uniform Fire Code*[™] specifically allows the code to be modified "where it is evident that a reasonable degree of safety is provided." The *International Fire Code*[®] states "fire protection in designated historic buildings and structures shall be provided in accordance with an approved fire protection plan." Compliance with current requirements of the IFC is not mandatory if there is not a serious life or fire risk.

This flexibility gives the fire code official the opportunity to review a broad range of alternate methods and materials, prescriptive code compliance, or performance-based design. Fire and building officials should work closely with owners and design professionals to ensure life safety and fire protection are achieved to protect these invaluable resources.

For additional information, refer to NFPA 1, *Uniform Fire Code*[™], Chapter 4; *International Fire Code*[®], Chapter 1; *International Building Code*[®], Chapter 1; or NFPA 5000[®], *Building Construction and Safety Code*[®], Chapter 15.