



Ed Hildebrandt: Inspector, Fireman, Building Commissioner and NFPA 30 Chairman

Ed Hildebrandt is chairman of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) committee that handles NFPA 30, Flammable and Combustible Liquids Code. NFPA 30 covers storage tanks, piping, valves, fittings, containers, and operations related to storing and distributing flammable and combustible liquids. In Jaime Kammerzell's interview, Ed reveals his past and current "regular jobs" and how he came to be chairman of one of the world's most influential fire code committees.



Ed Hildebrandt is taking a call at his desk, December 2000.

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What is your regular job today?

I am the Building Commissioner for the Village of Morton Grove, IL, a suburb of Chicago. I issue all of the building permits. My department also administers village land use and zoning ordinances, mechanical, plumbing and electrical codes, property maintenance (housing) codes and environmental health codes, including food service sanitation, for buildings and properties within Morton Grove. I am involved in everything but the fire codes, which are administered by the Morton Grove fire department, where I previously worked for 20 years. In addition to myself, the building department has two full-time inspectors, six part-time inspectors, a part-time village planner and, of course, the glue that holds the department together, our secretary.

Where were you educated?

I attended the Illinois Institute of Technology's fire protection engineering program for two years. My education was interrupted in 1969 when I went to work for the Illinois Inspection and Rating Bureau—predecessor of ISO Commercial Risk, a fire insurance inspection service. For about a year, I inspected "non-sprinklered" buildings on the west side of Chicago. For the ensuing year and a half, I did fire

protection surveys of municipalities for the Bureau's municipal grading department. I returned to school to get an Associate degree in fire protection technology from Oakton (IL) Community College (1975) and a Bachelor of Arts degree in business and management from Northeastern Illinois University (1978).

How did you get into your current job?

I was hired by the Village of Morton Grove as a fire fighter in November 1971. A year later, I was drafted. So I spent the next two years in the Army. I came back to the fire department in December 1974. In May 1976, I was assigned to the fire prevention bureau. I worked in various positions as a fire inspector, fire investigator and fire safety educator for about 15 years and advanced to the position of Deputy Fire Marshall. In November 1989, I started working in the dual capacity of Deputy Fire Marshall and Building Commissioner. In December 1991, I retired from the fire department. I am still working as Building Commissioner.

How did you get involved in the NFPA 30 Committee?

Bill Rehr, who is now with BOCA International, was a member of the NFPA 30 Committee. The Committee was meeting in Chicago in 1984, which was about the time the Committee began discussing unattended self-service stations. Bill couldn't make the meeting. He asked me to fill in for him and make a few comments, even though I couldn't vote in his place. I enjoyed filling in for him. The people on the NFPA 30 Committee seemed really dedicated and focused on trying to improve fire safety while allowing business to operate, which impressed me. I must have flabbergasted somebody, because I was asked to join the Committee. I applied for Committee membership and was accepted in October 1985.

In order to maintain a balance of interest on committees, the NFPA places all committee members into one of nine classifications based upon their principal interest in the committee's activities. Classifications are manufacturer, user, installer/maintainer, labor, applied research/testing laboratory, enforcing authority, insurance, consumer and special expert. Members of any one classification cannot exceed 30 percent of a committee's membership. I am classified as an enforcing authority, which is defined as a representative of an agency or organization that promulgates or enforces standards.

Ed & Chris Hildebrandt in May 1974 at Ft. Jackson,  **SC.**

Please explain what the NFPA 30 Committee is about.

NFPA 30, Flammable and Combustible Liquids Code, is NFPA's basic document for flammable and combustible liquids. It covers, in general terms, the storage of flammable liquids—anything from a small, pint-size container up to a very large oil-field tank. It also covers the general operations involving flammable liquids. For example, processing plants, blending operations, warehousing and retail sales that involve the use of flammable liquids would all be controlled by NFPA 30. There are also specialty documents, for example NFPA 30A, Automotive and Marine Service Station Code, that

cover the unique situation of service stations. And there are other documents—such as NFPA 33, Standard for Spray Application Using Flammable or Combustible Materials, and others—that, because of their unique nature, require special considerations or have special rules. But the basic document for the safe storage and handling of flammable liquids is NFPA 30.

How did you become chairman of the NFPA 30 Committee?

In 1990, Don Johnson, chairman at the time, was retiring from Chevron Oil, which meant that he would no longer be chairman of the NFPA 30 Committee. I had been acting as chairman for the Committee's task-group on Storage and Warehousing of Containers. At that time, NFPA was leaning toward assigning enforcement people as committee chairpersons. I was asked to chair the NFPA 30 Committee and I agreed.

What is your job as chairman?

The 1990 edition was the last edition of NFPA 30 that was developed and established under one committee. Up to that point NFPA 30 was controlled by a 30-member committee that tried to cover the gamut of flammable liquid use—everything from storage and containers in a warehouse through oil-field tanks, bulk storage plants and industrial operations using flammable liquids. Beginning with the 1993 edition—because we were getting into some really diverse, highly technical issues, especially with storage and containers—we felt it would be better to focus the committee membership. It was becoming obvious to us that certain people had expertise in one area and limited expertise in others. We thought it would be better for everyone if we reorganized the committee and had a separate technical committee for each chapter of NFPA 30.

Starting in 1993, we came up with a Technical Correlating Committee for Flammable and Combustible Liquids. That's actually what I chair now, the Correlating Committee. We oversee and coordinate the writing of the entire document, which is under four technical committees. One technical committee handles tank storage and piping. The second technical committee handles warehousing and storage of containers and portable tanks. The third committee handles operations. A fourth committee on fundamentals handles the basic definitions, general principles and the scope of the document.

As Correlating Committee chairman, I try to keep the whole effort moving in the right direction. For me to say that I have all the expertise as chairman and I am the Great Guru of flammable liquids would be a real fallacy. One of the reasons that I've stayed with the NFPA 30 Committee is that we've got some great people on the committee who have a tremendous amount of expertise in their fields.

I've found that chairing the committee in its various forms over the last 10 years is really a matter of keeping people focused on the issues. The 20 to 30 people on each of those technical committees do an excellent job of ruffling through the issues, discussing them on all sides and then coming together and reaching a consensus of what should be done. So I see myself more as a moderator by keeping everyone focused and on-task. Of course, I get to put my two-cents in at the appropriate times.

I think it's worked real well. Like I said, we've been very fortunate to have, in my opinion, some highly

qualified people working on the committees; people really dedicated to seeing that the document remains in a usable format and to move it along so that it's current with the times and issues of the day.

Why is NFPA developing a building code?

It's my impression that NFPA is trying to round out its package of fire safety codes. NFPA never had a building code, as such, in the past and is trying to close the loop and complete its code package with a building construction document. To my knowledge, this would be the first "consensus" building code. The other building code bodies adopt their building codes by vote of membership. But they don't particularly follow the ANSI process like NFPA does.

The NFPA Standards Council is very careful when placing members on technical committees to assure well balanced representation by various member classifications. As mentioned earlier, voting committee members represent not only fire and building officials, but manufacturers, users, consumers, insurance interests and others.

The NFPA process for submitting suggested code changes is also very "user-friendly." The process encourages literally anyone to submit suggested changes or additions to code language. Each proposed change is thoroughly considered by the appropriate technical committee. If a proposal is not accepted as submitted, the technical committee must explain its reason for modifying or rejecting the proposal. All proposals and the committee actions are published for public comment in the NFPA "Report on Proposal." Any public comment received as a result of the "Report on Proposal" is reviewed by the full technical committee.

If a comment is not accepted as submitted, the technical committee must explain its reason for modifying or rejecting the comment. These actions are published in the NFPA "Report on Comments." Final action on any proposed revision to an NFPA document occurs at the NFPA spring or fall meeting of the association's membership. Prior to a vote of NFPA members, one final opportunity is offered for public comment. In my opinion, this is the best process to ensure that quality codes and standards are developed. I am proud to be a part of this process.

The process is lengthy. One code change cycle for NFPA 30 covers a three year period. At the May 2000 NFPA meeting, the latest edition of NFPA 30 was approved by the NFPA membership. In November 2000 we started work on the 2003 edition that will be ready for presentation to the NFPA membership at the May 2003 meeting.



Ed & Chris Hildebrandt in July 1974.

Why is the NFPA renumbering the fire codes?

NFPA is trying, through its revised manual of style, to use a new numbering system in which each paragraph has a unique number, rather than have a subsection number with five or six different requirements listed in it, as is now the case. For enforcement reasons, we are trying to get it nailed down so that each requirement has it's own unique subsection number for easier use. Renumbering is

one of a series of changes to NFPA documents designed to make the codes and standards easier to use. Other changes include use of performance based language where appropriate, elimination of exceptions where possible and use of SI units as the primary units of measure with the inch-pound values placed in parentheses (the reverse of current policy on units of measure).

Does the NFPA enforce the tank rules?

NFPA doesn't enforce anything. We write the code. We never approve any equipment, devices or systems discussed in any of the NFPA documents. We tell people how we feel equipment should be installed, but the actual authority and responsibility for approving the installation rest with the authorities having jurisdiction. Such authorities might be local enforcers, insurance companies, or whoever has final jurisdiction over a particular installation or operation.

We give guidance on how the work should be done. The NFPA doesn't officially come out and list any products as approved for use. We don't give any approvals. That's all left up to the local people. But we do give direction as to what should be considered before something is approved. For example, on large aboveground tanks, we'll reference a few different tank publications. For example, UL 142, Standard for Steel Aboveground Tanks for Flammable and Combustible Liquids is specifically cited as a document for a tank that is designed to a standard that should be acceptable under the NFPA guidelines. NFPA doesn't have any actual enforcement power. We just write a document that can be adopted by a local jurisdiction and used as their enforcing tool.

(Left to right) Bill Zimmer, Department Building Commissioner; Bonnie Burnett, Environmental Health Practitioner; Ed Hildebrandt, Building Commissioner; Martha Huber, Secretary.



What is the relationship between NFPA 30 and Federal EPA rules?

We have had some concerns in this area. Environmental issues were being discussed at about the time I got on the committee. We had some discussion back then about the need to stay away from trying to write US EPA regulations into NFPA 30. Our concern was that NFPA 30 is used worldwide. At the time, we didn't think it was right, and I still don't feel that it's right, for NFPA 30 to force a US EPA rule on the rest of the world. NFPA 30 is used extensively in the Middle East, Indonesia and South America and has been formally adopted by some of those jurisdictions. If we put US EPA requirements into NFPA 30, that, in effect, would make those requirements worldwide requirements.

Basically, we have left NFPA 30 as a fire-safety standard and try to stay away from the environmental issue. That's a whole different animal. But we have tried to keep NFPA 30 current. For example, when it became popular to remove underground tanks and replace them with aboveground tanks, NFPA 30 tried to stay current and write new regulations for aboveground storage and storage within buildings. Other areas concerned warehousing and use of plastic containers, use of manufactured storage lockers and vapor recovery systems.

Tell me about your family.

I met my wife, Christine, in the Army. She came from Barberton, OH and was a clerk in the finance

office at Fort Jackson, SC where I was a finance clerk. We met when we both were in an office bowling league. It was a mixed-couples league and we were thrown together on the same team. Bowling led to matrimony. We have three grown children. Our son, David, is married to Kim and lives in Chicago. He teaches high school English in Chicago and Kim is a junior-high teacher in Libertyville, IL. We have another son, Erik, who is an interior design consultant in the Chicago area. My daughter, Amy, is 20 and engaged to be married in October, 2001. Amy lives with some friends in Palatine, IL and works a couple jobs there. My wife has a pet turtle, "Bob" (as in bobs his head), and we have acquired our daughter's rabbit, A.J.

Would you like to add anything else?

It's been an enjoyable time working with the NFPA 30 Committee. As I mentioned before, I work with a great bunch of people. When you get 30 people together in each of these committees, it keeps work interesting. We don't always agree 100 percent, but we are able to agree on our disagreements, and I think that's what's good about it. I've been fortunate with the village of Morton Grove, too. They've supported me for 15 years now with the committee work, and it's never been a problem getting the time to spend with the NFPA and with the committees. I appreciate all the support I get from the mayor and village administrator.

I look forward to a few more years as chairman and then some more time when I can sit back as a committee member and "harass" the new chairman. NFPA rules state that committee chairs can only serve for 10 years, then they have to step down so that we get in some new blood. This will be my last cycle as Correlating Committee Chairman. So when the 2003 edition comes out, I'll have to step down as chairman of the Correlating Committee.

I plan on staying involved with the committee work after I am no longer chairman. It is easy to "look good" with the support of Bob Benedetti, NFPA staff liaison to the NFPA 30 committees, technical committee chairs Brook Smith, Tony Ordile, Jack Woycheese and John Hawley, and all the dedicated technical committee members.

Managing Editor of PE&T