



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

The Tide Has Turned

In Canada there is an area known as the “Bay of Fundy”. Its claim to fame is that it is the location of the greatest range in tidal flow in the world. Its low tide reveals a vast area of mud flats. Its high range obliterates the plains of mud with depths of water that exceed 50 feet.

One does not want to be far from the shoreline when that tide begins to come in. If you are a good swimmer, or if you have a small raft, I guess you could survive. A better idea would be to know the timetable for the tide and to be in the right spot at the right time.

For many of us involved in trying to advocate residential sprinkler technology in residences, the tide has been out for a long time. I might go so far as to note that many advocates have been left “high and dry” by the process. Many individuals have spent a great deal of their mental energy on seeing a residential code come into existence without seeing a lot of support from their peers. At times this quest has really been frustrating.

The tide began to change about 3 years ago with the development of code changing proposals that were aimed at getting sprinkler provisions into model code. The influx of more and more dedicated advocates into that process started to be felt. The depth of the “water” began to go above the proverbial ankles of those standing in the bottom rung of the advocacy ladder. Local groups began to cooperate with regional groups. The water got deeper as regional groups linked up with state groups. Lastly, the groups that have been operating at the national level linked up with the state groups. In short, the spectrum of cooperative behavior from top to bottom and from side to side, became a real channel of communications. The water level got to the knees, so to speak.

A real defining moment for the tidal influx was the first vote at Rochester. It required a simple majority to pass. And it did. In spite of the fact that we did not win the super majority on the second vote, did not diminish the fact that a majority had been achieved. The water level at that point, went to the waist. Even our adversaries had had to recognize that we had achieved a critical mass.

Contemporary literature calls that the “Tipping Point” Author Malcolm Gladwell, popularized the concept a few years ago. A tipping point is reached when the popular perception begins to affect public influence. Some say that the tipping point was earlier. Some feel it was after the group went home from Rochester with a renewed vigor to pursue the goal. At any rate, a large number of people began to focus their time and energy upon the issue and the flood tide continued.

Right now, my image of flood water rising might take on another visual symbol; Noah’s Ark. The water is over most people’s heads now and its time to get in the boat and be part of the generation that will



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

have borne witness to the flood.

In a previous column I have suggested that its time. It is time to see this happen. And there is no time that is better than right now. I would suggest that you have several options open to you to maximize your own contributions to the process. These three steps are as follows:

1. Become a better informed and equipped advocate
2. Become a better equipped and influential educator of your clientele
3. Become a pilgrim to be one of those that arrive in Minneapolis to make our goal happen

With regard to suggestion number one, I would ask you to look at the resources you have accumulated and ask yourself if there aren't more tools to put in the tool box. How complete is your library on the topic? How extensive is your bibliography?

In the modern age of information technology it is not hard to collect pdf's of documents that can be used to influence and educate others. Here is a list of websites that you can go to download what you can. Distribute it everywhere you can.

- <http://www.IRCFireSprinkler.org>
- <http://www.homefiresprinkler.org/hfsc.html>
- <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/safety/sprinklers/>
- <http://www/nfsa.org/>
- <http://www.firesafehome.org/indexFlash.html>
- <http://www.firesprinkler.org/>
- <http://www.campusfire.org/>
- <http://www.fireteamusa.com>
- <http://www.fireteamentennessee.com>
- <http://www.homesafetycouncil.org>

While you are at it, make sure you go to the IRC's website and peruse the documents there. That site has only been up for a short while and according to our counting software, the site has received over 166,000 hits since going live. Some 17,000 have occurred in the last thirty days.

You might want to get a copy of the DVD produced by the IRC Residential Code Committee. It is public domain software. Distribute it to your department's public education personnel. Make it available to your local cable TV public access channel. Give it to your local high school science teacher.

By the way, while you are at it, you might want to look at the recent DVD by the Society of Fire Protection Engineers on 'FIRE'. The combination of these two DVD's makes a nice package for fire



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

science classes. There is also no limit to the imagination as to how and when you can use these DVD's to help shape public opinion.

The last course of action is simple. Find a way to be in Minneapolis at the hearing. Be there to vote. Be there to see the "high tide" of the residential sprinkler movement achieve its most significant accomplishment since sprinklers were first put into manufacturing buildings a little over 100 years ago.

Right now it has been projected that if we can deliver the right number of votes to achieve a super majority, we can prevail. We already have a major commitment from the early adopters and the lifelong advocates. We know that they would be there.

Are you already one of them? If so, we will see you in Minneapolis. But, if you are not, please consider what you can do to join us. If ten people in each state, that right now have no plans to go, change their minds and do go we will truly prevail.

I hope you are among those that can see your way clear to be there and be part of the high water mark of modern fire protection.