

BUILDING CODES

Building codes and industry standards have an important role in the apartment sector, as they establish the minimum requirements for the design, construction, alteration and maintenance of apartment buildings. The apartment industry actively participates in the development of national model codes and standards, working to ensure that requirements are practical, cost-effective and meet the unique needs of multifamily construction.

NMHC/NAA Viewpoint

The apartment industry supports building codes and standards that are technologically feasible, cost effective and reflect the unique needs of multifamily buildings to enable the apartment industry to deliver housing affordable to America's working households.

The apartment industry supports the use of model codes and standards, which are developed and published by independent organizations such as the International Code Council (ICC), National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE). In all, multifamily developers are affected by 14 international model codes and dozens of industry standards.

These codes provide uniformity and relieve state and local jurisdictions from the burden of creating individual building codes. However, model codes and standards are not in effect or enforceable until a state or local jurisdiction adopts them in whole or in part. Through the adoption, and amendment, process jurisdictions play an essential role in ensuring that the model codes meet the specific needs of their communities.

Because of the unique nature of multifamily buildings—they follow code requirements for both commercial and residential structures—it is important that policymakers consider the costs and feasibility of particular code provisions in housing. Unnecessary requirements drive up the cost of housing at a time when the nation is experiencing a housing affordability crisis. From 2000 to 2015, the U.S. underproduced 7.3 million units of housing according to ECONorthwest.

A recent study by NMHC and the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) found that 32 percent of multifamily development costs are attributable to compliance with local, state and federal regulations, with an average of seven percent of those costs stemming from building code changes over the past 10 years.

Several issue areas raise significant and distinct concerns for apartment properties. These include fire safety requirements, energy efficiency measures, accessibility and green building requirements. In addition, apartment properties increasingly face new challenges as government at all levels seek to use building codes to advance interests beyond traditional life safety and structural issues, such as climate change.

The apartment industry supports cost-effective and technologically feasible improvements to building performance, operational efficiency and sustainability. However, changes to building codes and standards must also address the need to preserve the continued affordability of rental housing.

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