

# A Brief History of Building Codes Brought to You by Sean Downes

DELRAY BEACH, FL, USA, July 10, 2020

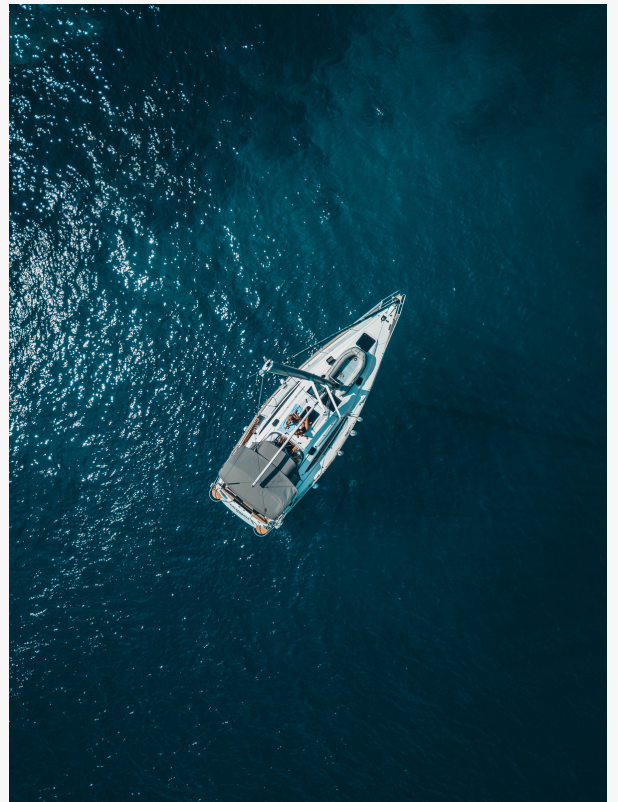
/EINPresswire.com/ -- Have you ever heard of the Code of Hammurabi? Literally written in stone in 2000 B.C. Babylon, it is considered the first-known building code. Although the Code of Hammurabi did not provide specifications or guidance on how to build a structure, it did include a pretty strict penalty for poor workmanship: "If a builder has built a house for a man and his work is not strong, and if the house he has built falls in and kills the householder, that builder shall be slain."

Today's home builders do not have to worry about being killed if their work isn't up to par, thank goodness. They do still have to care about compliance with building codes, however! Keep reading to learn a little bit about the history of building codes, thanks to the expertise of building official and plans examiner [Sean Downes](#).

Fast forward from ancient Babylon to the 17th century, when codes began to focus on fire safety, spurred by devastating blazes such as the great fires in London (1666) and Boston (1631). These codes outlawed the use of flammable materials, namely thatch and wood, in the construction of chimneys and roofs. A century later, George Washington drew up plans for the District of Columbia, in which he advised that wood-frame buildings be constructed according to certain height and area guidelines.

Over the next several centuries, municipalities in the U.S. issued codes to address fire escapes, light, ventilation, stairs, railings, water supply, toilets, and sanitary drains. All, explains Sean Downes, were written in the spirit of protecting the public as cities began to experience tremendous growth and development.

In 1905, the National Board of Fire Underwriters published the Recommended National Building Code; this, in turn, gave rise to organizations of building officials whose job it was to enforce



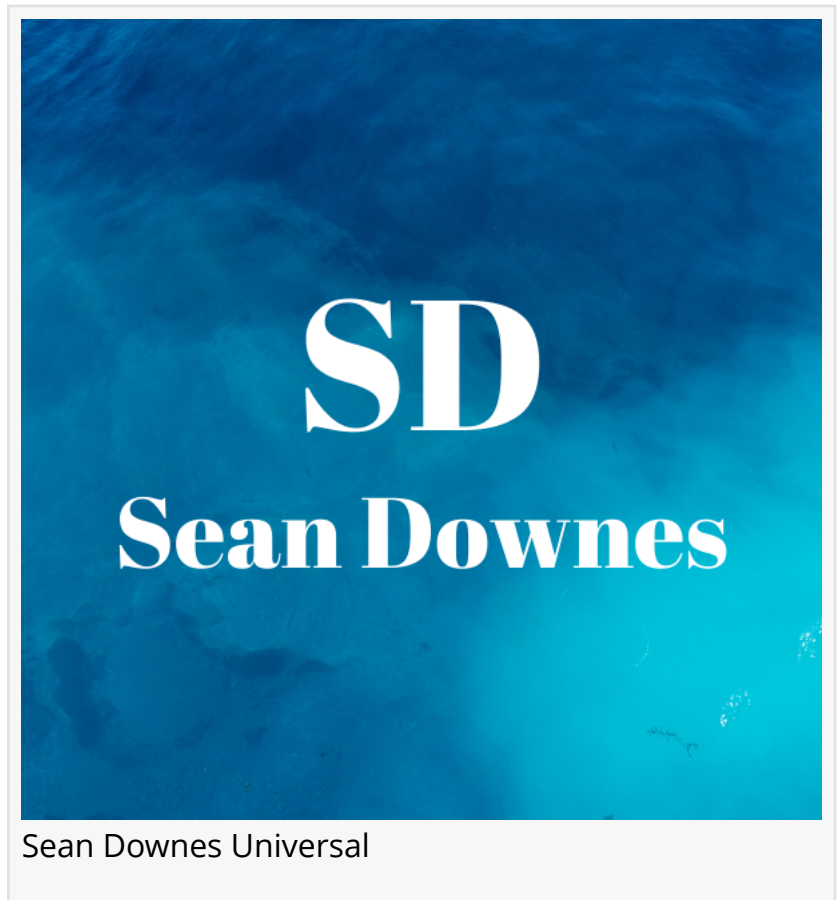
Sean Downes

compliance with codes. Throughout the 20th century, several regional code organizations competed with local, proprietary code associations. It was not easy for building officials, architects, builders, and inspectors to keep track of what codes to follow where let alone changes to those codes that were published piecemeal.

In fact, [Sean Downes Wife](#) explains, it was not until 1972 that the Council of American Building Officials convened to develop a single national model for building codes. In doing so, it aggregated the various groups and their differing recommendations under one organization, to better serve the public.

Nevertheless, the United States does not use one unified national code. Instead, according to [Sean Downes Universal](#), codes are developed and published by states and other local jurisdictions. That is just one of the many reasons that plan inspectors, building officials, and similar professionals play such important roles in the construction of homes, commercial buildings, and other structures.

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