



Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code vs. the International Fire Code

When buildings or structures, except exempt structures such as farm structures, are constructed in Virginia and when work is done on existing buildings and structures, the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC) ensures that a minimum level of safety is achieved. After the work is completed, the Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC) ensures that the level of safety in those buildings and structures is maintained. The USBC regulates construction related aspects of fire safety and the SFPC regulates certain maintenance and operational related aspects of fire safety in existing buildings and outdoors. Both regulations incorporate provisions of the International Fire Code (IFC), a national model code that contains a comprehensive set of fire safety regulations that was developed to be used as a stand-alone code in jurisdictions that do not have a building code, or to be used in conjunction with the International Building Code (IBC) in localities that utilize the IBC as their model building code. The IFC also contains fire prevention regulations related to operations and the maintenance of buildings, structures and systems, that can be referenced in jurisdictions that have a fire prevention code.

Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code: Applicable to maintenance of buildings and structures and their associated systems and equipment, after construction, alteration or installation is completed and approved in accordance with the USBC. The local fire official or State Fire Marshal enforce the SFPC.

NOTE: The SFPC also contains operational fire prevention requirements that may not be related to buildings or structures (fireworks, blasting, etc.).

International Fire Code: Certain provisions are applicable to the design, construction and installation of buildings, structures and equipment, when specifically referenced by the USBC. The local building official or state building official enforce the USBC referenced provisions of the IFC.

Local governments in Virginia are required to enforce the USBC. Enforcement of the SFPC is at the option of the local governments. The State Fire Marshal's Office has the authority to enforce the SFPC in those localities in which there is no local SFPC enforcement.

FAQs

What is the major model code referenced by the Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC)?

The International Fire Code (IFC) published by the International Code Council is the major model code adopted and incorporated by reference in the SFPC. However, only the IFC requirements within the scope of the SFPC (maintenance and operations) are enforceable. Most of the unenforceable (construction related) provisions of the IFC have been removed from the 2015 and later editions of the SFPC and any construction related items that remain are not enforceable.

What is the major difference between the IFC and the SFPC?

The IFC is designed and structured as a standalone code to include construction, maintenance and operation provisions. Its content makes it easy for governing bodies to adopt it in its entirety as a single stand-alone regulation; or, amend as needed if adopted as part of the ICC family of codes. In Virginia, the USBC regulates the design and construction of buildings and structures and the SFPC regulates the maintenance of buildings, systems and structures as well as other operations related to fire prevention, so the design and construction requirements that are regulated by the USBC have been removed.

Why is the SFPC amending the IFC since the model code was already thoroughly vetted at the national level, by the experts in the field?

The majority of the SFPC amendments are editorial in nature and intended to remove unenforceable construction related requirements, which according to state law, are not applicable in Virginia. Some other provisions, such as On-Demand Mobile Fueling requirements, for instance, are also deleted given that such operations are prohibited by state law.

Does the SFPC apply to new construction?

No. The SFPC applies to existing buildings only. The review and inspection of buildings under construction are performed under the purview of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC). The SFPC provisions can only be applied to a given building or structure after the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy (or, final building inspection as/when applicable).

Does the IFC apply to new construction?

Yes. References to the IFC can be found throughout the USBC. Each time the IFC is referenced in the USBC, those provisions of the IFC are incorporated as an enforceable part of the USBC.

When the USBC references the IFC, does it mean the IFC or the SFPC?

The IFC. When enforcing the USBC, **it is important to remember that any references to the IFC are just that, and are not a reference to the SFPC.** I.e. the 2018 VCC, Table 307.1(1), footnote “m” refers the reader to “Section 603.3.2 of the International Fire Code.” That does not mean Section 603.3.2 of the SFPC which has been amended by Virginia, but the unamended Section 603.3.2 of the IFC.

The SFPC does not contain many tables found throughout the IFC. How can those provisions be enforced since they are no longer in the SFPC?

The model code – IFC, is updated on a three-year-cycle. In many cases the provisions set forth by certain tables are no longer applicable to buildings constructed under a previous edition of the USBC. Ergo, the tables are deleted and replaced with a “pointer” to the applicable building code. The applicable building code – USBC, will refer the reader to the applicable USBC and associated IFC edition referenced when the structure was approved, which contains the respective tables.

The SFPC requires compliance with “the applicable building code”. Does that mean with the current USBC?

No (in most cases. See Note below). “The applicable building Code”, in the context of the SFPC, means the code and referenced standards in effect at the time the building or portion thereof was constructed, altered, renovated, or

underwent a change of occupancy. I.e.: the applicable building code for a building constructed under the 2006 USBC and which has not been renovated/altered/underwent a change of occupancy since, is the 2006 USBC.

Note: in some cases the current USBC edition is “the applicable building code”, if the building in case was constructed under the current enforceable USBC edition.

Can the SFPC require modifications or installation of construction elements or systems regulated by the applicable building code, in a similar manner as the IFC does?

No. The SFPC is a maintenance code and not a construction code. Construction requirements are found in the applicable building code. The intent of the SFPC is to ensure that the buildings and associated systems are maintained as originally constructed under the purview of the applicable building code.

Is there an easy way to determine which was “the applicable building code” during a given year?

Yes. The 2018 SFPC, VEBC, VMC and the Related Laws Package contain a chart listing the effective dates of each USBC (and SFPC) edition since its (their) inception.

Link to [Virginia Codes](#)