

Effective Use of the International Mechanical Code

The *International Mechanical Code*[®] (IMC[®]) is a model code that regulates the design and installation of mechanical systems, appliances, appliance venting, duct and ventilation systems, combustion air provisions, hydronic systems and solar systems. The purpose of the code is to establish the minimum acceptable level of safety and to protect life and property from the potential dangers associated with the installation and operation of mechanical systems. The code also protects the personnel that install, maintain, service and replace the systems and appliances addressed by this code.

The IMC is primarily a prescriptive code with some performance text. The code relies heavily on product specifications and listings to provide much of the appliance and equipment installation requirements. The general Section 105.2 and the exception to Section 403.2 allow designs and installations to be performed by approved engineering methods as alternatives to the prescriptive methods in the code.

The format of the IMC allows each chapter to be devoted to a particular subject with the exception of Chapter 3, which contains general subject matters that are not extensive enough to warrant their own independent chapter.

Chapter 1 Scope and Administration. Chapter 1 establishes the limits of applicability of the code and describes how the code is to be applied and enforced. A mechanical code, like any other code, is intended to be adopted as a legally enforceable document and it cannot be effective without adequate provisions for its administration and enforcement. The provisions of Chapter 1 establish the authority and duties of the code official appointed by the jurisdiction having authority and also establish the rights and privileges of the design professional, contractor and property owner.

Chapter 2 Definitions. Chapter 2 is the repository of the definitions of terms used in the body of the code. Codes are technical documents and every word and term can impact the meaning of the code text and the intended results. The code often uses terms that have a unique meaning in the code and the code meaning can differ substantially from the ordinarily understood meaning of the term as used outside of the code.

The terms defined in Chapter 2 are deemed to be of prime importance in establishing the meaning and intent of the code text that uses the terms. The user of the code should be familiar with and consult this chapter because the definitions are essential to the correct interpretation of the code and because the user may not be aware that a term is defined.

Chapter 3 General Regulations. Chapter 3 contains broadly applicable requirements related to appliance location and installation, appliance and systems access, protection of structural elements, condensate disposal and clearances to combustibles, among others.

Chapter 4 Ventilation. Chapter 4 includes means for protecting building occupant health by controlling the quality of indoor air and protecting property from the effects of inadequate ventilation. In some cases, ventilation is required to prevent or reduce a health hazard by removing contaminants at their source.

Ventilation is both necessary and desirable for the control of air contaminants, moisture and temperature. Habitable and occupiable spaces are ventilated to promote a healthy and comfortable environment for the occupants. Uninhabited and unoccupied spaces are ventilated to protect the building structure from the harmful effects of excessive humidity and heat. Ventilation of specific occupancies is necessary to minimize the potential for toxic or otherwise harmful substances to reach dangerously high concentrations in air.

Chapter 5 Exhaust Systems. Chapter 5 provides guidelines for reasonable protection of life, property and health from the hazards associated with exhaust systems, air contaminants and smoke development in the event of a fire. In most cases, these hazards involve materials and gases that are flammable, explosive, toxic or otherwise hazardous. Where contaminants are known to be present in quantities that are irritating or harmful to the occupants' health or are hazardous in a fire, both naturally and mechanically ventilated spaces must be equipped with mechanical exhaust systems capable of collecting and removing the contaminants.

This chapter contains requirements for the installation of exhaust systems, with an emphasis on the structural integrity of the systems and equipment involved and the overall impact of the systems on the fire safety performance of the building. It includes requirements for the exhaust of commercial kitchen grease- and smoke-laden air, hazardous fumes and toxic gases, clothes dryer moisture and heat and dust, stock and refuse materials.

Chapter 6 Duct Systems. Chapter 6 of the code regulates the materials and methods used for constructing and installing ducts, plenums, system controls, exhaust systems, fire protection systems and related components that affect the overall performance of a building's air distribution system and the reasonable protection of life and property from the hazards associated with air-moving equipment and systems. This chapter contains requirements for the installation of supply, return and exhaust air systems. Specific exhaust systems are also addressed in Chapter 5. Information on the design of duct systems is limited to that in Section 603.2. The code is very much concerned with the structural integrity of the systems and the overall impact of the systems on the fire safety and life safety performance of the building. Design considerations such as duct sizing, maximum efficiency, cost effectiveness, occupant comfort and convenience are the responsibility of the design professional. The provisions for the protection of duct penetrations of wall, floor, ceiling and roof assemblies are extracted from the *International Building Code*.

Chapter 7 Combustion Air. Complete combustion of solid and liquid fuel is essential for the proper operation of appliances, for control of harmful emissions and for achieving maximum fuel efficiency.

The specific combustion air requirements provided in previous editions of the code have been deleted in favor of a single section that directs the user to NFPA 31 for oil-fired appliance combustion air requirements and the manufacturer's installation instructions for solid-fuel burning appliances. For gas-fired appliances, the provisions of the *International Fuel Gas Code* are applicable.

Chapter 8 Chimneys and Vents. Chapter 8 is intended to regulate the design, construction, installation, maintenance, repair and approval of chimneys, vents and their connections to solid and liquid fuel-burning appliances. The requirements of this chapter are intended to achieve the complete removal of the products of combustion from fuel-burning appliances and equipment. This chapter includes regulations for the proper selection, design, construction and installation of a chimney or vent, along with appropriate measures to minimize the related potential fire hazards. A chimney or vent must be designed for the type of appliance or equipment it serves. Chimneys and vents are designed for specific applications depending on the flue gas temperatures and the type of fuel being burned in the appliance. Chimneys and vents for gas-fired appliances are covered in the *International Fuel Gas Code*.

Chapter 9 Specific Appliances, Fireplaces and Solid Fuel-burning Equipment. Chapter 9 sets minimum construction and performance criteria for fireplaces, appliances and equipment and provides for the safe installation of these items. It reflects the code's intent to specifically address all of the types of appliances that the code intends to regulate. Other regulations affecting the installation of solid fuel-burning fireplaces, appliances and accessory appliances are found in Chapters 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14.

Chapter 10 Boilers, Water Heaters and Pressure Vessels. Chapter 10 presents regulations for the proper installation of boilers, water heaters and pressure vessels to protect life and property from the hazards associated with those appliances and vessels. It applies to all types of boilers and pressure vessels, regardless of size, heat input, operating pressure or operating temperature.

Because pressure vessels are closed containers designed to contain liquids, gases or both under pressure, they must be designed and installed to prevent structural failures that can result in extremely hazardous situations. Certain safety features are therefore provided in Chapter 10 to reduce the potential for explosion hazards.

Chapter 11 Refrigeration. Chapter 11 contains regulations pertaining to the life safety of building occupants. These regulations establish minimum requirements to achieve the proper design, construction, installation and operation of refrigeration systems. Refrigeration systems are a combination of interconnected components and piping assembled to form a closed circuit in which a refrigerant is circulated. The system's function is to extract heat from a location or medium, and to reject that heat to a different location or medium. This chapter establishes reasonable safeguards for the occupants by defining and mandating practices that are consistent with the practices and experience of the industry.

Chapter 12 Hydronic Piping. Hydronic piping includes piping, fittings and valves used in building space conditioning systems. Applications include hot water, chilled water, steam, steam condensate, brines and water/antifreeze mixtures. Chapter 12 contains the provisions that govern the construction, installation, alteration and repair of all hydronic piping systems that affect reliability, serviceability, energy efficiency and safety.

Chapter 13 Fuel Oil Piping and Storage. Chapter 13 regulates the design and installation of fuel oil storage and piping systems. The regulations include reference to construction standards for above-ground and underground storage tanks, material standards for piping systems (both above-ground and underground) and extensive requirements for the proper assembly of system piping and components. The *International Fire Code* (IFC) covers subjects not addressed in detail here. The provisions in this chapter are intended to prevent fires, leaks and spills involving fuel oil storage and piping systems.

Chapter 14 Solar Systems. Chapter 14 establishes provisions for the safe installation, operation and repair of solar energy systems used for space heating or cooling, domestic hot water heating or processing. Although such systems use components similar to those of conventional mechanical equipment, many of these provisions are unique to solar energy systems.

Chapter 15 Referenced Standards. Chapter 15 lists all of the product and installation standards and codes that are referenced throughout Chapters 1 through 14. As stated in Section 102.8, these standards and codes become an enforceable part of the code (to the prescribed extent of the reference) as if printed in the body of the code. Chapter 15 provides the full title and edition year of the standards and codes in addition to the address of the promulgators and the section numbers in which the standards and codes are referenced.

Appendix A Chimney Connector Pass-throughs. Appendix A provides figures that illustrate various requirements in the body of the code. Figure A-1 illustrates the chimney connector clearance requirements of Table 803.10.4.

Appendix B Recommended Permit Fee Schedule. Appendix B provides a sample permit fee schedule for mechanical permits. The local jurisdiction can adopt this appendix and fill in the dollar amounts in the blank spaces to establish their official permit fee schedule. The ICC does not establish permit fees because the code is adopted throughout the country and there are vast differences in operating budgets between different parts of the country, as well as between large and small municipalities within the same region.

