



National Electrical Manufacturers Association

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**Testimony of the National Electrical Manufacturers Association
Before the Pennsylvania Senate Committee on Labor and Industry**

**Re: SB 1023– *Legislation Amending the Act of November 10, 1999
(P.L. 491, No. 45), Known as the Pennsylvania Construction Code Act***

September 24, 2013

POSITION: Support Improvements to RAC Process

The National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on Pennsylvania Senate Bill 1023, *Legislation Amending the Act of November 10, 1999 (P.L. 491, No. 45), Known as the Pennsylvania Construction Code Act*. NEMA is the principal trade association representing the interests of the U.S. electrical product manufacturing industry. The U.S. electrical product industry accounts for more than 7,000 manufacturing facilities, nearly 400,000 workers, and over \$100 billion in total U.S. shipments. The 47 NEMA member companies in Pennsylvania alone account for 81 facilities and provide over 10,000 manufacturing jobs.

These comments reflect the view of NEMA member companies that manufacture and supply electrical equipment that must comply with the Pennsylvania Uniform Construction Code.

NEMA recognizes that thoughtful improvements to the Pennsylvania Uniform Construction Code Review & Advisory Council need to be made in order to ensure that the UCC is updated in a timely, transparent, and more predictable manner.

In 2012, the RAC attempted to review all 900 changes in accordance with the UCC’s “opt-in” process—each proposed code change must be adopted by a two-thirds majority of the RAC. NEMA is concerned that the RAC does not have the time, expertise or resources to perform this enormous task. As a result of the process in 2012, the RAC simply voted to reject ALL code updates.

NEMA believes that the “opt-in” model in SB 1023 would significantly improve processes at the RAC. With the “opt-in” model, new code provisions would go into effect unless specifically excluded by the RAC. This would promote a more streamlined, timely, transparent, and predictable code review and adoption process for all stakeholders involved, and allow the RAC to review only those provisions members of the RAC or the public deem as of concern to Pennsylvania.

In addition, NEMA firmly supports maintaining a triennial construction code review and adoption cycle that coincides with the national model code publishing cycle. Retaining this three-year cadence of adoption ensures a uniform standard of safety for all occupants in the built environment. A three-year cycle enables the codes to incorporate the latest advancements in safety technology as well as innovations in design and installation practices.

I. Building Codes Put Safety First, Protect Consumers

Model building codes are designed to save lives and protect property. They allow for economies of scale in the production of building materials and construction, as well as a level of safety for first responders during and after fires and other disaster events.

The codes are developed by code officials and building industry professionals through a rigorous consensus-based process. In fact, a number of professionals from the state of Pennsylvania participate directly on the committees that develop these model codes. The standards-setting organizations update their model codes every three years to reflect innovations in materials, technology and experience from building failures. It is critical that Pennsylvania evaluate and adopt new codes to reap these benefits for its citizens.

For example, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates that electrical safety devices such as the Arc-Fault Circuit Interrupters (AFCI) could prevent more than 50% of the electrical fires that occur every year. The CPSC also estimates that two-thirds of electrocutions occurring each year could be prevented by installing electrical safety products such as Ground-Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCI) in every home in the United States.

Maintaining timely adoption of the code ensures that all Pennsylvania residents are afforded the same protections provided by these and other life-saving devices.

II. Building Codes Protect Property, Reduce Disaster Recovery Costs

Building codes are also designed to protect property from fires as well as major storms and natural disasters. The codes reflect constant changes and innovations in disaster-resistant construction materials and designs – making building structures more resilient to these damaging weather events.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), when states stay current on code adoption, home- and business-owners are better equipped to reduce damages and loss to their property in the event of an extreme weather event. This means that Pennsylvania will spend less on disaster recovery.

For your reference, Pennsylvania received over \$12 billion for Hurricane Sandy relief in 2012, and a quarter of a billion dollars in federal disaster aid to recover from Tropical Storm Lee and Hurricane Irene in 2011. According to testimony by FEMA, every dollar spent on mitigation saves four dollars in recovery costs. It is just not a fiscally responsible use of taxpayer funds to pay for disaster aid, but not to maintain up to date building codes.

III. Building Energy Codes Promote Cost Savings to Consumers

Pennsylvania consumers can save money on their energy bills through state adoption of the most current model building energy code (International Energy Conservation Code or IECC) and standard (ASHRAE 90.1). Homes and businesses constructed with the most current energy code and standard save significant dollars on energy usage. For businesses, this translates into more capital available to invest directly into the economy, hiring more employees, and even expanding business operations.

To give you an idea, buildings constructed to the 2012 IECC are approximately 15% more efficient than ones constructed to the 2009 edition, and 30% more efficient than the 2006 edition. Thus, maintaining current adoption of the latest energy code is a win for consumers, a win for business, and a win for the state economy.

IV. NEMA Supports Improvements to Pennsylvania Building Code Review Process

In conclusion, NEMA recognizes that the building code review process in Pennsylvania has been inconsistent in the past. This inconsistency has led to confusion and uncertainty among the industry. We believe that Pennsylvania should strengthen its law to make code review and adoption more predictable, transparent, and timely in accordance with the publication of the most current model codes. Our industry stands ready to lend our expertise in this area and work with members of the legislature and the RAC now and in the future.

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