

THE ACADEMY OF ELECTRICAL CONTRACTING

Paper presented by

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The Electrical Inspector and Contractor - 1980
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A great many present day discussions center around what will happen to this interest or that business in the future. At this time let's discuss not just what will happen to electrical contractor in the future, for there have been many projections along this line, but what will happen to electrical contractor in relationship with the inspector in the future. At the present time, the electrical contractor is enjoying probably the finest relationship with this essential and dedicated part of the industry, the electrical inspector. Is that relationship going to continue to grow and continue to work as a single thrust to make a better industry, or will changing times also change this picture.

The electrical inspector today faces many tasks that have a tendency to confuse and frustrate him. If he dealt only with the industry and the owner and never dealt with the contractor, his life would be completely miserable. Because the contractor and inspector can work together, they find in each other an ally, and therein the two can face the industry and the owner, resulting in a unified better project, a better job, and a harmonious output. The inspector frequently finds the industry hostile and unfriendly to his desire to do an effective job. (He sometimes finds this within the ranks of the contractors.) The inspector represents "the enforcer" and it is the contractor's duty and responsibility to support and promote better inspection. For herein lies the strength of the industry and the unbiased support that all work be done in a safe manner and by essentially the same ground rules. There are

those among you that will lift an eyebrow at this concept of contractor-inspector relationship; however, by and large most inspectors try to do a good job, most contractors want to do a good job and most contractors and inspectors work together and support each other.

Let's look for a moment at the job being done today in the electrical industry. First the rules are revised each three years by way of the National Electrical Code. The manufacturers are building, hand over fist, products that go to infinite length to automate everything. The homes, offices, hospitals, etc. are a maze of controls and sophisticated equipment that require new and extensive wiring techniques. New and revised articles are appearing in the code before the inspector has a chance to read the previous article. The inspector and contractor are having to absorb enough information about new types of installations to keep inside code rules let alone master or be knowledgeable about them. Don't forget we are still fighting many problems in the mobile home and the modular building units.

All of this confusion, expansion and new equipment has brought the inspector and contractor close together. They must work together to accomplish anything or they will always be fighting different interpretations or differences of opinion.

As projected by any number of my peers and by far more informed people than I, we can safely see, in the future, more modular construction, more systems construction by single contractors, more complex system

in hospitals, etc. and an overall attempt to speed up construction and reduce relative costs. This can't be interpreted to mean that things will get less complex, but should be interpreted to say the day of the single contractor specializing in only the electrical, heating, or plumbing is fast becoming a thing of the past. By 1980 the contractor will be a sum of these and more. He will incorporate within his organization some or all of these trades plus skills that haven't been used before.

Where is the inspector on such a wild flying scheme of things. Is he singled out to do the electrical inspection only or does he join the parade and begin to move in the direction of the complex systems? I feel that the inspector of twenty years ago who looked at the services, branch circuit wiring and grounding is as out of date today as today's inspector will be compared to the 1980 type inspector. The future inspector will be a technically oriented and trained individual who must know air conditioning, electrical and electronic control, boilers and pipefitting techniques and interlocking of all systems. Security and alarm systems will be major installation areas. Hospitals, industrial plants and such will be classified for specialist only, but the inspector must come from the central pool. Joint inspecting teams will be common place.

I further feel that a part of inspection fees will be set aside for training, schooling and upgrading. Few inspector teams can survive tomorrow's technical requirements for knowhow without schools. In hospitals alone the many life support systems and intensive care areas make today's electrical contractor a novice in the field if he hasn't worked in these areas in the last year or two.

It is conceivable that both the contractor and inspector organizations will unite in an effort to promote advance technological approaches to these intricate and complex system installations. Certainly the working together of the inspector and contractor groups must continue to grow closer and more dependent upon each other. As to whether a distinction will continue to be made between the building, electrical, plumbing, heating and other inspectors is speculative. I feel that the building inspector will head up a group of teams. One team will be for residential construction, one for commercial, one for industrial and one for institutional. Some joint use of team inspectors will be done, but by and large these inspector teams will begin to specialize in area type construction covering all systems in that type of building. The 1980 inspector will indeed be a highly trained multi-skilled technician. A large portion of his time will be spent in training, schooling and upgrading. His counterpart, the contractor, will and must be involved in the same type of program.