MASONRY ADVISORY COUNCIL

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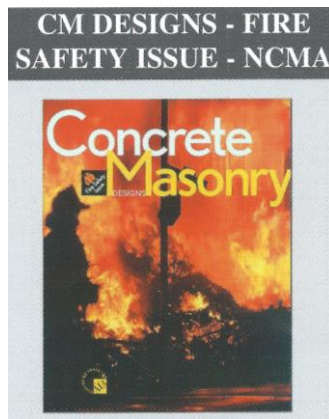phone: 847-297-6704   fax: 847-297-8373
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To: Architects, Engineers, Builder Developers/Contractors/Owners/Fire & Building Officials
From: Masonry Advisory Council

Re: Fire Safety

Attributes forgotten that need to be mentioned more often:
- Concrete and masonry can stop the spread of fires.
- To provide the best protection for occupants and afford the greatest opportunity to live, ride out a fire and/or escape, the local Masonry Advisory Council always recommends that codes for buildings require a balanced design made up of four key elements:

  1. fire detection
  2. suppression
  3. education
  4. containment

Fire detection including the installation of smoke detectors and fire alarms. Active fire suppression includes the use of sprinkler systems. Education involves the fire prevention services with annual inspections (fire drills, training of personnel including occupants/building owners.) Finally, the fourth element is fire containment. Fire containment includes, fire barriers, firewalls, exterior walls, floors and roofs of noncombustible fire resistant materials such as concrete and masonry.

Masonry walls can reduce or eliminate the spread of fire and provides precious additional protection and time for occupants to exit or ride out a fire. But today, new model building codes and fire codes have strayed significantly from the discussed balanced design approach to fire safety. The public and design professional should know about this dilution of fire safety and demand redundancy in fire safety. You should never trade off compartmentation or detection for just suppression. Fire safety involves two types of systems - active and passive. Compartmentation is built into a structure, suppression and detection systems can be deactivated, or not properly maintained.

What we do need for fire safety in the 21st century is – Balanced Design!