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Beyond Code

There's a movement afoot in this country that's changing the way we build, especially along the coast. We are moving away from the time when basic building code once set a de facto standard for construction toward a new era in which building standards are reaching beyond code. We see it in the increasing recognition of the Energy Star "brand" — the EPA's successful push to label energy-efficient products, including new homes. We see it in programs like the IBHS "Fortified ... for Safer Living" (www.disastersafety.org) and My Safe Florida Home (www.mysafefloridahome.com) that certify hurricane-resistant homes. And we're seeing it everywhere in the explosion of green building programs. The USGBC Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (or LEED) Green Building Rating System seems to have lit the match, and it's touched off a virtual wildfire of state and municipal programs that provide incentives and impose restrictions related to the energy, water, and health performance of homes.

All of these programs share an interesting likeness: they all combine educational outreach (to teach builders and building owners the benefits of reaching beyond code) and an inspection, or enforcement, component to verify that the standard of quality has been met.

For the most part the beyond-code movement has been a push for voluntary standards. But it's taking an interesting turn. Increasingly, state, county, and municipal building departments are getting involved in the development of green building programs. Participation isn't always mandatory, but it's increasingly rewarded by the government in the form of tax breaks and permits. A similar change seems to be emerging with hurricane-resistant construction. The Florida Building Commission's new "hurricane mitigation" rule (see "Required Roof Retrofits," page 9) is in some ways simply a new code. But its mandate is tied to participation in the state insurance program, and buried in the fine print of this rule are provisions for a "beyond code" standard that will require the state to implement training programs for both builders and inspectors.

Education and enforcement are the new e-words that continue to drive quality. And in this pairing, we might realize a new era for government as well. Shouldn't all regulation be intimately tied to training? I like to think all building codes will eventually evolve beyond mere enforcement to include educa-

tion as a part of their institutional mission. Code officials have a unique opportunity to help builders improve the way buildings are put together. Codes shouldn't be just about whacking builders for nonperformance but rather about instructing builders in best practices. In my rash optimism, I'd like to think this evolution is well on its way.

— Clayton DeKorne



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