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San Antonio Braces for Plumbing Code Showdown

San Antonio, Texas (Sept. 8, 2009) – Department of Planning and Development officials are leading an initiative to change the City of San Antonio's adopted plumbing code from the *Uniform Plumbing Code (UPC®)* to the International Plumbing Code (IPC), a move critics are calling unnecessary, wasteful and potentially harmful to residents of the United States' seventh-most populous city.

At its Thursday, Oct 1, meeting the San Antonio City Council will consider a recommendation made by the city's Plumbing Appeals and Advisory Board (PAAB) to adopt the 2009 International Plumbing Code (IPC) and 2009 International Fuel Gas Code (IFGC), with 61 pages of amendments, as the standard governing the installation and maintenance of plumbing and fuel gas systems in San Antonio. The city adopted the UPC in the early 1970s and has used it continuously since. The Council could motion to retain the existing UPC and simply update from the 2006 to the 2009 edition, which incorporates 19 pages of city-specific amendments.

Richard Weyel, United Association business manager, Local #142, San Antonio, contends the switch from the *UPC* to the *IPC/IFGC*, which would come at a significant cost to the city, is unnecessary, especially considering that the suggested 61 amended pages basically mirror the language of the already-in-use 2006 *UPC*. (The main selling point of the *IPC/IFGC* is they are published by the same code development body that produces the city's adopted building codes.) A change would create confusion among trained contractors and inspectors and require vital time, energy and training, which would be costly to everyone in the industry. Additionally, all provisions within the *IPC* and *IFGC* are found in the single *UPC* codebook, which represents a significant monetary savings for contractors and designers purchasing one book instead of two.

"It's the proverbial 'If it isn't broken, why fix it?' argument," said Terry Collins, past president of the San Antonio Chapter of the American Society of Plumbing Engineers (ASPE). "The *UPC* is a superior code with better safeguards with regard to the health and safety of San Antonio's citizens. It is the plumbing code of choice by the city's licensed plumbers."

Differences between the codes are often subtle, but they can come with grave consequences. For instance, some contend that a March medical gas accident in Lawrence, Kan., that left a teenager in a coma for nearly two months may have been avoided if the city was using the *UPC* instead of the *IPC*. The *UPC* requires those who install medical gas systems to be certified in that skill; the *IPC* does not. Furthermore, the *UPC* dictates a qualified medical gas inspection be made prior to use. The *IPC* has similar language, but does not oblige the adopting city to enforce it. In this case, an uncertified installer mixed up the gas lines during installation, causing a life-altering accident during a routine dental procedure. No official inspection was conducted prior to the accident.

The *UPC* and its accompanying *Uniform Mechanical Code (UMC®)* are the only model plumbing and mechanical codes in the United States to be designated American National Standards by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). The International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO) introduced the *UPC* in 1928 and has developed it using an open consensus process since 2001.

For more information on San Antonio's plumbing code debate, the Oct. 1 City Council meeting or plumbing code development, please contact IAPMO Field Services Manager John Mata at (713) 539-3828 or by e-mail at john.mata@iapmo.org.

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Sponsor of the Uniform Codes, IAPMO – The International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials – works in concert with government and industry for safe, sanitary plumbing and mechanical systems. Learn more about IAPMO at www.iapmo.org.

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