

M-COG to help municipalities decide on code inspections 8-506

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Municipalities in Pennsylvania have until next April to decide how to handle residential building inspections.

And Mountain Council of Governments (M-COG) is trying to help local municipalities pick the best option.

Dan Guydish, the M-COG's executive director, said municipalities have to choose whether to "opt in" to the new state law, Act 45, which contains provisions of the national Uniform Building Code, or "opt out" and allow state inspectors to do local inspections.

But Guydish said it is better for municipalities to "opt in" and either do the inspections themselves or hire an outside firm like the City of Hazleton has done, Barry Isett and Associates, which made a presentation to M-COG members recently.

Hiring an outside firm is less expensive than a municipi-

ality having trained inspectors on duty – especially if the municipality does not have enough inspections to keep the inspector busy on a full-time basis.

"It's a win-win situation for municipalities to opt in," Guydish said. "If a municipality hires a third-party company like the city has done, they will be saving money because, with a third-party vendor, they don't have to hire trained people, especially smaller municipalities whose needs are infrequent. And they are making some money on the permits."

Act 45 actually went into effect in Pennsylvania some time ago, but inspectors who were not trained were "grandfathered" in, meaning they did not have to be trained in the new codes – until next April for residential inspections and April 2008 for commercial inspections.

Guydish said municipalities

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can opt in to parts of the law, for instance just residential or just commercial. Or they can give the inspections to a third-party vendor and do commercial inspections themselves and vice versa, etc.

But Guydish wants to get local municipalities together and hire the third-party service through the M-COG – so that each municipality would get the lowest price.

"My goal is to get as many of our local municipalities as I can for the COG, so that we can set up a program for all municipalities," Guydish said. "The fee structure would be significantly lower

with a COG-type operation."

Another problem with state inspections is that they are done at the convenience of state inspectors being available. So a building owner may have to wait several weeks to get an inspection done.

"But if a company like Barry Isett would be on duty, they would have somebody in the area who would schedule their inspections geographically, and there would not be a long wait."

Guydish said any municipalities interested in finding out more or who are interested in a potential M-COG set can call Guydish at 455-1508.

One issue M-COG members have agreed on is the joint purchase and use of a sewer camera. Guydish said the camera, which has been jointly purchased by six M-COG members and rented to others, has "had the glitches worked out and is ready to go."

Another piece of equipment Guydish is asking M-COG members to purchase is the Asphalt Zipper, which mills old asphalt and grinds it into an aggregate that can be used as the base for a new road.

The M-COG also approved a contract with American Rock Salt, Mt. Morris, N.Y., to provide winter road salt to M-COG members at \$40.88 per ton.