



## perCode Officials of Arkansas Newsletter

### FALL CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 13-18, 2026

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### ARKANSAS STATE CODE ADOPTION PANEL

Arkansas State Fire Marshal's Office is convening a committee to review the 2024 IFC, IBC, and IRC for potential adoption into the Arkansas Fire Prevention Code.

### MECHANICAL ISSUES

Mechanical issues across Arkansas that need to be addressed.



## HOW DOES THE ARKANSAS BUILDING CODE FIT INSIDE THE FIRE PREVENTION CODE?

The Arkansas Fire Prevention Code (AFPC) is a single statewide code made up of Fire, Building, and Residential volumes.

The Building Code (Volume II) has legal force because it is incorporated directly into the AFPC and applies whenever the Fire Code triggers new construction, alteration, or changes in use within the scope of Volume II

The Arkansas Fire Prevention Code is authorized by Act 254 of 1955, codified at Arkansas Code Annotated (A.C.A) §§12-13-101 to 12-13-116 and the Fire Marshal issues rules to implement and enforce the AFPC.

Arkansas treats the building code as an integral part of the AFPC, not as a separate system, so any Fire-Code-triggered work on a building must meet Volume II requirements.

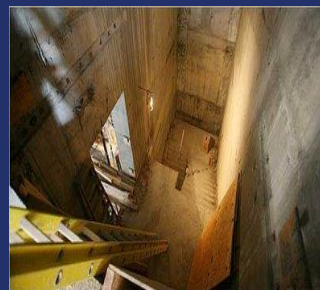
The Fire Code identifies the fire and life-safety condition and the need for action, while Volume II governs how that action is designed and constructed.

## Know which source you're in:

This is about getting design teams to correctly identify the actual code book and ordinances the jurisdiction is obligated to enforce before drawings are finished.

As a building/code official (Authority Having Jurisdiction, AHJ), our job is to enforce the specific codes and ordinances that each city or county has formally adopted along with the state adopted codes, nothing more and nothing less.

That "source" is a combination of model codes (like the IBC/IRC), state adoptions, and local amendments passed by our governing body. We are legally bound to those sources when we review plans and perform inspections.



## Voluntary compliance first:

### Key practices:

- Offer pre-application or pre-construction meetings with owners, contractors, and design professionals to review code expectations, local amendments, and frequent trouble spots
- When you find a deficiency, explain it on site: reference the specific code, describe the safety or performance risk, and outline acceptable ways to correct it
- Be consistent across projects and builders so similar situations receive the same response, avoiding any appearance of favoritism

### What a voluntary-first inspection approach looks like:

- Clarify requirements during plan review so issues are caught on paper instead of in the field
- Work with contractors during inspections to correct problems through clear explanations, written corrections, and re-inspections
- Use stop-work orders or legal action only when there is serious or repeated non-compliance, especially where safety is at risk

### Our basic ladder:

- We educate and explain
- We document corrections and re-inspections
- We issue stop-work or pursue formal enforcement only for imminent danger or repeated refusal to comply

## Key dollar thresholds code officials should remember during plan review and inspections.

In Arkansas, licensing is based mainly on the type of project and the total contract value (labor, materials, subs, permits, etc.)

### Commercial work

A state commercial contractor's license is required for any commercial project (anything that is not a single-family residence) when the contract is 50,000 dollars or more, including labor and materials

### Residential work

A residential contractor license is required for single-family residential projects with a contract value no more than 2,000 dollars, including labor, materials, subs, and permits.

This includes residential builders, residential remodelers, Improvement contractors, and residential roofers when the project value exceeds 2,000 dollars

If you want to build competency in inspecting flex duct, [click here](#) to visit the Air Duct Council and complete the installation course and certification test.

#### **HVAC code issues commonly missed in residential inspections (clearances, condensate, combustion air)**

- Clearances and access: International Mechanical Code (IMC 2021) Chapter 3, especially Section 306
- Combustion air: Arkansas Fuel and Gas Code (AFGC) Chapter 3 & 5
- Condensate: IMC 2021 Section 307 (including 307.2.1, 307.2.1.1, 307.2.2, 307.2.3)

#### **Flex duct connections:**

- Flex duct connections must be mechanically fastened and sealed by the manufacturer's instructions typically with an approved mechanical fastener (such as a zip tie or clamp) and properly applied mastic or listed tape
- Mechanical fastening and sealing of ducts: IMC 2021 Chapter 6, Section 603 and its subsections (joints/seams must be mechanically fastened and sealed with approved mastics or tapes)

#### **Gas piping materials and joints (Chapter 4, e.g., Section 403.10)**

- Regulates materials (steel, copper where allowed, CSST, etc.) and how joints are made (threaded, brazed, welded, listed press fittings)

AFGC Section 406.4.1 requires each segment of consumer piping to be tested at not less than 1.5 times the proposed maximum working pressure, and not less than 3 psi, with minimum test durations such as 15 minutes for a single-family dwelling or systems of 250 cubic feet or less.

#### **Piping installation and protection (Chapter 4, e.g., Section 404)**

- Covers routing of gas piping through buildings, protection from damage, and burial/encasement rules

Example: AFGC Section 404.14 prohibits gas piping from being installed underground beneath buildings unless it is in an approved conduit, with detailed requirements on how the conduit must be extended, sealed, vented, and protected.

#### **Leak testing and purging (Chapter 4, Section 406)**

- Specifies how gas piping must be pressure-tested before being placed in service, test pressures, and duration

Example: AFGC Section 406.4.1 requires each segment of consumer piping to be tested at not less than 1.5 times the proposed maximum working pressure and not less than 3 psi, with minimum test durations (15 minutes for a single-family dwelling or systems  $\leq 250 \text{ ft}^3$ ).

- Purging provisions govern how piping is purged outdoors before use, especially at higher pressures

#### **Appliance installation and over-pressure protection (Chapter 5)**

- Applies to gas-fired HVAC equipment as "gas utilization equipment" and sets rules for connections, shutoff valves, regulators, and over-pressure protection

Sections like AFGC 503.4.1 (plastic venting) require that when plastic venting is used, the appliance must be listed for that specific vent material and the venting installed in accordance with the manufacturer's installation instructions.

Later sections address regulators and protecting low-pressure appliances (14 inches water column or less) where connected to higher-pressure (over 2 psi) hybrid gas systems.

#### **Combustion air and venting (Chapters 3 and 5)**

- The AFGC has its own combustion air and venting provisions that work in tandem with IMC Chapter 7
- These rules govern how gas-fired furnaces and other HVAC appliances get combustion air and how their vent systems must be sized and routed
- Mini-split installation should be permitted as mechanical work under the adopted Arkansas codes.

May 2026 Building Safety Month

Proclamation:

City of Ash flat

City of Ward

City of Cabot

City of Jonesboro

City of Centerton

City of Lowell

City of Pocahontas

Code Officials of Arkansas

City of Wynne

## Practical guidance for Arkansas building officials

Maintain a local “code matrix” that lists the current Arkansas-adopted codes (AFPC, electrical, plumbing, mechanical, energy, etc.) along with any local amendments, including ordinance numbers and effective dates.

During design of major public projects, coordinate early with state regulatory entities (State Fire Marshal, Building Authority, Health Department, Energy Office) and with municipal departments to align state requirements, local zoning, access, utilities, and fire protection needs.

When the General Assembly passes a bill that touches building, fire, or housing standards, assign someone to read the final act summary and confirm whether it requires changes to local ordinances, forms, or inspection procedures.

Train staff annually on “what is state minimum, what is local amendment, and what is policy preference” so that all plan reviewers and inspectors give consistent explanations at the counter and in the field.

## Why coordination with the General Assembly matters

Every regular and fiscal session, the Arkansas General Assembly runs bills that can change which codes you enforce, how you enforce them, or what your community can adopt locally. Many of these bills amend titles in the Arkansas Code or state agency authority, which then flow down into the Arkansas Fire Prevention Code, the Arkansas Building Code, and related state rules.

For local building, fire, and housing officials, staying plugged into the legislative process is now a basic part of maintaining a **modern** and defensible code program.

### Tracking legislation that affects codes

Officials do not need to become lobbyists, but we do need a simple system for monitoring code-related bills.

Use the General Assembly website “Bills & Resolutions” search at the start and middle of each session. Filter by keywords such as “building code,” “fire prevention,” “residential,” “plumbing,” “mechanical,” “energy,” and “minimum standards.”

Watch interim committee agendas (Public Health, Welfare and Labor; City, County and Local Affairs; State Agencies) where code, fire, and housing items often appear for study before bills are drafted.

Sign up for email alerts or RSS feeds for bill tracking services commonly used by Arkansas cities and counties, so staff get automatic updates when code statutes are amended. Many jurisdictions coordinate this through their city attorney or city manager’s office.

During rulemaking, follow state agencies that adopt and amend technical codes: the State Fire Marshal (Arkansas Fire Prevention Code), the Division of Building Authority, and the Arkansas Energy Office, among others.

### Minimum state standards: what they are

Arkansas follows a common national model: the state adopts minimum technical standards, and local governments enforce them. The Arkansas Fire Prevention Code (including the Arkansas Building and Residential Codes) is adopted at the state level and applies statewide, including in rural and unincorporated areas.

Minimum standards are exactly that: the floor, not the ceiling, for safety.

State statutes and rules control when they are stricter than the model codes or than local provisions.

For state projects, Arkansas law and the Arkansas Fire Prevention Code take precedence where they exceed the base code requirements, and project designers must comply with all applicable Arkansas laws and the adopted codes.

Local amendments must not weaken the state-adopted minimum standards, but they may be more restrictive to address local hazards (for example, enhanced wind or tornado design, wildland-urban interface requirements, or tighter multifamily fire protection).

## Fire and life safety

Existing buildings require a balanced approach that prioritizes risk reduction while recognizing practical constraints.

Under the Arkansas Fire Prevention Code, nonconforming (“grandfathered”) conditions do not remove the responsibility to correct hazards, particularly when a building undergoes a change of use, occupancy classification, or significant renovation.

These triggers often require reevaluation of the building’s life safety features to ensure they align with current risk profiles.

Code officials play a critical role in identifying practical, enforceable solutions that enhance safety without imposing unnecessary burdens.

Emphasis should be placed on targeted retrofits such as upgraded fire detection and alarm systems, improved occupant notification, and enhanced means of egress, including emergency lighting and exit marking.

Where full compliance with new construction standards is not feasible, incremental improvements can still significantly reduce life safety risks.

Ultimately, the goal is not to penalize existing buildings for their age, but to ensure that occupants are afforded a reasonable level of protection based on current hazards.

Consistent application of these principles helps maintain fairness, supports economic viability, and, most importantly, safeguards lives.

## Contractors License

In Arkansas, code officials should generally flag home-improvement work over \$2,000 for contractor licensing and bonding issues, and over \$10,000 for stronger written-contract detail requirements. For public jobs, the competitive bidding threshold is \$35,000 for state and local taxing units, so projects above that amount trigger formal bid rules.

### Private home-improvement jobs

A contractor building, repairing, or improving a home costing more than \$2,000 is required to be licensed and bonded by the Arkansas Contractors Licensing Board. Arkansas law also exempts residential/home-improvement work at or below \$2,000, but it says contractors cannot split a project into separate sub-\$2,000 contracts to avoid the rule.

For jobs exceeding \$2,000, code officials should expect a written, signed contract before work begins, with a clear scope, cost, payment terms, and contractor identity. For contracts over \$10,000, officials should look for more specific payment-schedule terms and conditions tied to progress or completion.

### What to watch during review

Officials should verify the Contractor’s license status, bond/insurance where required, and whether the work matches the license classification. They should also watch for price increases or scope changes that were not approved in writing, because Arkansas consumer guidance specifically recommends written approval before those changes happen.

A practical red flag is any attempt to break a larger job into multiple smaller contracts to stay under the \$2,000 threshold. Another red flag is a contractor asking for full payment up front or refusing to provide a written contract with completion dates and payment terms.

### Public construction threshold

For public improvements, Arkansas Code § 22-9-203 requires competitive bidding when estimated costs exceed \$35,000 for the state, counties, municipalities, school districts, and other local taxing units. That is the key dollar amount code officials should use when reviewing public work subject to bidding rules.

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