

Know what codes builders must follow

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In the first six months of 2004, 3,918 single-family home building permits were issued in the 20-county metropolitan Atlanta area, according to the Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association. That's an increase of 14 percent over the same period in 2003.

These statistics mean that many of us are purchasing new homes. The smart buyer wants to know that their home is being constructed according to accepted standards. These standards are commonly known as building codes.

When inspecting new homes, I find that there is a great deal of confusion among buyers, real estate agents and even builders as to what codes apply to their homes. The following is a brief explanation of the history and current status of building codes in Georgia.

In March 1989, the Georgia General Assembly passed House Bill 154 into law. This bill established a system of uniform building codes for the state. These codes went into effect on Oct. 1, 1991.

Although there are seven mandatory codes, the one that applies to single-family houses is a modified version of the CABO (Council of American Building Officials) 1 and 2 Family Dwelling code. The state did not adopt the plumbing section of the CABO code. Instead, it adopted the standard plumbing code. For electrical, the state adopted the national electrical code published by the National Fire Protection Association.

All these codes are mandatory. This means that the code has to be observed by builders and contractors in every local jurisdiction in the state. The code also applies to homes undergoing remodeling if the aggregate cost of alteration to "the exterior envelope; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems; water-heating systems, or lighting systems exceeds 10 percent of the assessed value of the building immediately prior to such alteration." For houses undergoing interior remodeling of the "physical configuration or interior space" the cost of the alteration must exceed one-fourth of the "assessed value of the building immediately prior to such alteration".

The codes are updated every three years, and the state of Georgia has the option to adopt the updates or continue to enforce the previous code. Currently — as of Jan. 1, 2003 — the codes in effect that apply most directly to single-family houses are:

- Standard Plumbing Code, 2000 Edition
- National Electrical Code, 2000 Edition
- CABO 1 and 2 Family Dwelling Code, 2000 Edition

Send home repair questions to Ask the Inspector at H&G@ajc.com. Because of the volume of mail, not all questions can be answered. Our expert, Bill Garwood, spent 15 years as a building contractor before becoming a home inspector in 1990. He is part owner of a residential inspection firm and a company providing training in building inspection and codes.