

Building inspectors panel discussion held in June

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On June 25 about 120 people turned out for a panel discussion featuring nine inspectors representing city, county and state officials of the building inspection field in Arizona.

The event was part of the Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA) Arizona chapter membership lunch meeting. Also included was a vendor showcase with 17 participants.

"I didn't know what to expect," said Jack Judd, chief building official for Yavapai County. "Anytime you get building inspectors and building officials mixing with contractors, sometimes they don't mix too well," laughed Judd, though he said he was impressed with the professionalism and quality of discussion during the event. Much of that discussion was on when permits are required for certain types of work, and what codes are used by what jurisdictions.

"I think it was somewhat of an eye-opener as well for the participating jurisdictions to see how differently they deal with issues. It sends you back home to look at your situation and evaluate if we are doing the right things, and are there things we should do differently," Judd explained.

As an example, Judd pointed out how Mesa does not require permits on some of the mechanical issues and changeout of equipment, whereas other jurisdictions do.

Covering such a diverse and vast area, Yavapai County deals with contractors from, basically, the



Nine building official representatives from the city, county and state level participated in a panel discussion with HVAC industry people on June 25 at the ACCA-AZ membership luncheon.

Phoenix area (such as Peoria) all the way to Sedona and places up to 7200 feet in elevation.

Chief of Inspections for the Arizona Registrar of Contractors, Bob Mechsner was also on the panel. He was happy to be able to present the ROC as a pro-contractor agency, since he often encounters the misconception that the ROC is mainly a consumer protection agency.

"We are really for the contractors," explained Mechsner. "Our effort is to weed out the bad ones and encourage the good ones. Contractors can file complaints, too. People don't realize that a general can file against a sub for workmanship just as easily as a homeowner can. Or if a subcontractor is not paid by a general, they can file a no-pay complaint."

With the current downturned economy, Mechsner said the complexion of complaints has changed from being a majority of workmanship-based complaints to a sharp

increase in straight abandonments, companies walking away from jobs or homes before they are complete.

"There are businesses that operate based on the down payment of the next sale, and when the sales stopped they were not liquid enough to even pay some of their subcontractors or suppliers," explained Mechsner.

New licenses are still being requested for people who start legitimate businesses, though the ROC investigations department is seeing a lot more unlicensed activity in this economy.

Other panelists participating included: Steve Hether (Deputy Building Safety Director, City of Mesa), Wendy Springborn-Pitman (Engineering Services Administrator, City of Tempe), Mike Prepenbrink (Building Inspector, City of Scottsdale), Steve Gallant (Building Inspections Manager, City of Scottsdale), Tom Paradise (Acting Building Asst. Safety Director, City

of Glendale), Adam Venetis (Plans Examiner, City of Glendale), Quinn Fortier (Electrical Inspector, City of Glendale).

Bringing inspectors and building officials together in a format like this has been something ACCA-AZ has wanted to do for a few years, said Executive Director Antoine Coffey. The association will host another inspectors panel during its annual trade show next spring.

"It certainly took some coordination with everyone's schedules to bring those people together for the day, but it exceeded our expectations," said Coffey.

Judd commented that there was a time when "building departments used to be kind of a good old boys industry," but now he feels they do their best to run professional organizations that work closely with the industry contractors. "We are there to help them and not hurt them," added Judd.