

U.S. Fire Administration / National Fire Academy

*Coffee Break Training***Topic: “Workmanlike Manner”**

Learning objective: The student shall be able to obtain a definition that is acceptable within his or her jurisdiction for the term “workmanlike manner.”

Fire and building codes and standards often state that building construction or equipment installations must be completed in a “workmanlike manner.” What does that mean?

Perhaps it’s like the old saying; “I may not know art, but I know it when I see it.”

While the definition for “workmanlike manner” may vary from State to State or even jurisdiction to jurisdiction, at least one State court has defined it as “the way work is customarily done by other contractors in the community.” Although subjective, this definition provides a baseline for community comparisons.

While codes and standards are intended to protect health, welfare, and safety, there may be times when certain minimum quality performance requirements must be met. The inspector may be the person who finds the questionable installations.

The accompanying illustration is a good example. While there are no specific code or standard prohibitions against pushing a sprinkler through a nonrated ceiling tile, one could easily argue that this is not the way fire sprinkler or ceiling contractors “customarily” do their work. The inspector should expect to see a cleanly cut and trimmed hole with the sprinkler completely clear of the tile. There

may even be a listed sprinkler escutcheon to conceal the hole.

If one examines this picture closely, he or she will see that there is another problem, though, that clearly is a violation of the sprinkler installation standards. In this instance, a sprinkler intended for an upright installation has been installed in the pendent position.

How does one determine what “workmanlike manner” means in his or her jurisdiction? Inspectors should check with State laws or court decisions for rulings and, if none exist, consider developing an agency policy.



This installation defies the definition of “workmanlike manner.”

Photo courtesy of West Metro Fire and Rescue of Lakewood, Colorado.