

U.S. Fire Administration / National Fire Academy

Warning: Hot Coffee!**Topic: Ready to Respond: Reporting Structural Hazards**

Learning objective: The student shall be able to report identified structural hazards to the appropriate official or agency for followup action.

Look closely at the photograph and you'll see one end of the canopy is attached to the telephone pole. While it may be a convenient way to support this heavy load, it is not typical of normal structural engineering standards, and it likely presents a serious collapse hazard.

This week, as we observe the third International Fire Fighter and EMS Safety Stand Down sponsored by the International Association of Fire Fighters and the IAFC Volunteer and Combination Officers Section, this picture illustrates an important safety message to protect the public and the firefighters who serve them.

This year's Safety Stand Down theme is "Ready to Respond." The focus is on proper training, preparation, and equipment use before an incident occurs; and promoting the idea that all members can respond to, work at, and return home safely from an emergency. Part of proper preparation is preincident planning and correcting apparent fire and structural hazards.

Fire inspectors and firefighters who conduct protective inspections are familiar with the code requirements for maintaining the integrity of fire-resistive construction elements. If a firewall is compromised, it must be repaired. If a fire door is blocked open, the obstruction must be removed.



Photo courtesy of Gregory Anderson, Fredericksburg, Texas.

But what about obvious or potential structural hazards? Fire inspection personnel generally do not have a great deal of experience or expertise evaluating structural supports. When fire inspectors or firefighters observe potential structural hazards, the problem should be reported to the local building code official who has the authority to evaluate the hazard or demand a third-party assessment based on the potential life safety risk.

As we focus on firefighter safety during this year's Stand Down, let's not forget to use all the "tools in the toolbox." Partnering with fire and building code officials to correct structural hazards is an effective means to mitigate firefighter deaths and injuries, and assure that "Everybody Goes Home."

For additional information, refer to *International Fire Code*[®], Chapter 1; or *NFPA 1, Uniform Fire Code*[™], Chapter 1.