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July 3, 2013

Hon. William Keller
Minority Chair
Labor and Industry Committee
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Po Box 202184
Harrisburg Pa 17120

RE: Proposed legislation regarding building demolition

Dear Representative Keller and Members,

I am writing in regards to the proposed amendments to the Pa Uniform Construction Code to regulate demolition permitting and procedures. In my experience as a municipal building code official, I begin with the basic fact that both construction and demolition are inherently dangerous by nature. However, that does not provide an excuse for irresponsible actions on behalf of contractors and construction workers. Although I do not know all of the facts surrounding the recent tragedy in Philadelphia, it appears more than likely it was an act in which the demolition contractor was not aware of or ignored the dangers of the task at hand. It is my opinion that many times the demolition contractor is more than likely an equipment operator who has gained demolition experience in his career. Please do not interpret the comment as derogatory. The fact is not all working in the field may possess qualifications to perform such dangerous tasks. Based upon a photo I had viewed, it appears the wall which had collapsed was unsupported for it's height which lead to instability thus causing it to fall suddenly. If the subject wall being constructed, it would have required bracing and supports to provide stability during construction. Yes, it is easy to be a Monday morning quarterback but perhaps in this case, pulling the wall down in sections as demolition was progressing would have been the better choice over the demolishing entire wall in a single phase. I don't know for certain. No matter what, the Uniform Construction Code and nearly all building codes require an architect or engineer to design the building for construction. Perhaps the UCC should require a design professional to calculate the demolition and determine safe practice. I know it sounds a bit excessive but when

you see how large buildings are imploded (as often seen on the national news); it is performed by specialists that know how to do it.

Those specialized professionals know how to place the explosive charges to allow for safe demolition. They know building science, the risks involved and how to make the project safer.

Therefore, I would suggest a possible amendment to require that a design professional or other professional with documented knowledge of demolition hazards perform a study to provide the contractor with instructions on how to proceed in a safe manner. I suggest the amendment target commercial buildings with height in excess of 2 stories or 30' and with a fall zone of less than 150% of the structure height. This would at least allow a safe demolition and work zone. In addition, barricades and warning signage indicating the demolition zone should also be required. In a final comment, it is sad we must legislate what is common sense to many. Safety should never be taken for granted. I am aware there may be others who believe legislation is just interference in our lives, professions and activities. As previously stated, it is sad we must legislate common sense. It is true what is known about accidents; 98% are preventable. The other 2% are truly accidents.

Thank you for allowing me to provide you testimony in this matter.

Sincerely,

John Groh, CBO, CFM
Building and Zoning Code Administrator
Borough of Edinboro