

Judd Gregg (NH), Lisa Murkowski (AK), Susan Collins (ME), and George Voinovich (OH). For a complete list of all subcommittee memberships: <http://appropriations.senate.gov/>.

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In Memorium...

Philip Keillor - John Philip "Phil" Keillor, Jr., age 71, passed away on Friday, Feb. 27, 2009.

After earning a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Minnesota, Phil moved to Madison, WI in 1972. He earned a master's degree in Ocean Engineering in 1973 from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, making him the first coastal engineer in the state. Phil worked as a coastal engineer for the UW Sea Grant Program for 29+ years before retiring in 2003. He continued to work as a consultant in his field up until his death and was particularly interested in climate change issues.

Danny Lee Fread - Danny Lee Fread; talented Engineer, noted researcher, public servant, teacher and friend died peacefully early Thursday morning, February 5th, 2009 at his home in Huntingdon, PA, at age 70.

After working as an Engineer for Texaco, Dr. Fread returned to the University of Missouri-Rolla where he received his PhD in Civil Engineering in 1971. Upon receiving his degree, Dr. Fread joined the Office of Hydrology at the U.S. National Weather Service in Silver Spring Maryland as a research hydrologist. Inspired by the tragedy of the failure of the Teton Dam, Dr. Fread's research focused on developing computer models that more accurately forecasted the flows of flooding rivers and the effects of dam failures. Dr. Fread's computer models have been used around the globe. He is the author of over seventy reports and journal articles, as well as three book contributions on various aspects of flow routing. He ended his career as Director of the Office of Hydrology at the U.S. National Weather Service in 2000.

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Submit your own items or suggestions for future topics to column editor Rebecca Quinn, CFM, at rcquinn@earthlink.net. Comments welcomed!

Here's Something You Might Find Interesting . . .

I've written this column for more than a year and haven't received much feedback. Thanks, however, to the few readers who have asked for additional clarification or challenged me, and to the two readers who have suggested topics.

This time I'm going to pose questions to you. Which of these have occurred to you? Which would you like to see answered in this column? If your #1 question isn't listed, please send it to me. And remember, I encourage ASFPM members to submit their own write ups.

Additions that are Substantial Improvements: What are differences between when an addition has to be elevated and when both the addition and the base building have to be elevated? I've read that what happens to the "common wall" influences the outcome.

Fences: Really? Some communities regulate fences in SFHAs? Why should I be concerned about fences in floodplains? What criteria are used to issue permits?

Manufactured Homes: We all know MFH units are vulnerable to flood damage. Given that, what's the rationale behind the NFIP regulation that allows homes in certain locations to be elevated only 36" above grade? What can my community do if we think that's not providing adequate protection to our citizens?

Below-Grade Crawlspace: The way I read FEMA's Technical Bulletin #11, we can approve below-grade crawlspaces if we modify our ordinance. But it also lists limitations that such crawlspaces can be approved only in very limited circumstances (less than 2' below grade, and total wall height of no more than 4'). What's the justification for that? Doesn't it mean below-grade crawlspaces can be used only in shallow floodplains?

Pre-FIRM Buildings that are Elevated: Homes in my part of the country have always been built on crawlspaces, and it looks like many might have their lowest floors above the BFE. I've heard that owners will pay less for insurance if their pre-FIRM buildings are eligible for post-FIRM rates. What should we tell owners who are interested in this?

Onsite Septic Systems: My community is starting to pay attention to sea level rise and we've noticed that more and more septic systems are failing. The NFIP regulations have requirements that these systems be "located to avoid impairment to them or contamination from them during flooding." How do we do that when we know it'll get worse over time?

Conditioned Enclosures: As humid as it is around here, we get a lot of requests to allow enclosures to be air conditioned. I hear northern communities get similar requests to allow conditioned crawlspaces, so this question is about enclosures in V Zones and A Zones. What are the limitations and complications of allowing conditioned enclosures?

Unusual Enclosures: Along our coast the BFEs are as high as 16 or more feet above grade – and they're mapped as V Zones. We've allowed "hanging" enclosures (typically two or three feet above grade so they're not flooded by every small storm) and "mezzanine" enclosures (small storage areas that are built on a deck below the elevated building). Someone has suggested these unusual enclosures aren't compliant and homeowners tell us their flood insurance policies are being re-rated as though the enclosure is the lowest floor. What's the rationale behind that?

Historic Structures and Additions: When is an addition really a new building? We have a historic structure that is on the National Register. The local historical society wants to build an "addition" that we think really is a separate building. It is considerably larger, has its own independent structural support and its own HVAC. The common wall will be modified by a doorway, but most of the wall won't be affected. Does the addition have to comply? Or is it excluded from the substantial improvement determination because it's an "alteration" of a historic structure?

Old Flood Maps: I just discovered a post-FIRM home in a V Zone that was permitted more than 20 years ago – and it's on a slab foundation, not elevated at all. The owner has submitted a permit application for work that we've determined is substantial improvement and we're concerned about liability if a mistake was made when the original permit was issued. The maps have been revised a couple of times, but we no longer have the map that was in effect at the time. What can we do? And does the home have to be brought into compliance with the effective zone and BFE?

Elevation on Fill: We'd like to encourage builders to avoid using fill. Between drainage problems, loss of trees, and concerns about use of poor soils, we feel we have a lot of evidence to justify our position. But using fill is the way it's always been done. What other reasons can we offer to bring about change?

Buildings over Water: I'm confused. I know buildings over water can be allowed in A Zones, but they have to be landward of the reach of mean high tide in V Zones. Flood insurance isn't available for a building that is over water, even in A zones. Why the difference?

Storm Shelters: Between FEMA funding safe rooms and public interest after big tornadoes, we see applications to put safe rooms in pre-FIRM buildings. How should we handle them? We understand the 2009 International Codes will reference a storm shelter standard. Does the standard deal with putting safe rooms in floodplains?

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Washington Legislative Report

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Gearing Up

While February was a busy month Congressionally speaking, it was also a month of setting the stage for future legislative action. March is already shaping up to be an extraordinarily busy month on the Hill, with some 60 plus hearings scheduled. There has been much focus on passage of the Omnibus Appropriations bill for FY 2009, essentially unfinished business from last year. That bill, which was finally passed and signed by the President on March 11th, includes some budget changes for FY '09 as well as earmarks. Most of those earmarks were "leftover" from the last Congress, but they caused problems for passage of the Omnibus because of President Obama's expressions of opposition to earmarks. After consideration of many amendments on the Senate floor, the need to clear the decks for action on the FY 2010 budget prevailed and the Omnibus was passed.

The Omnibus Appropriations bill for FY '09 extends authority for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) until September 30, 2009.

The new Administration has released its 2010 budget, but in overview format. The "real" budget, complete with the detailed budget requests, will be released in mid-April. Many committees have initiated budget hearings, but the serious process of hearings on specific department and agency budget requests cannot begin until the detailed budget is released in April.

Much attention has been given in the Senate to the confirmation process for Presidential nominees. Those committee hearings and votes will continue for a number of months as the new Administration continues to announce new nominees. The arrival of new appointees enables the federal departments and agencies to develop their priorities and plans, so there is some sense of frustration and urgency about moving that process along.

During February and early March, many appointments to Congressional committees were still taking place and committees were holding their organizational meetings to consider their own agendas and priorities. That process seems to be essentially complete now.