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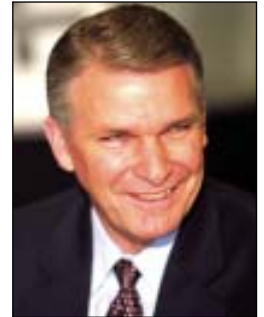
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Small Task, Big Reward

by James Lee Witt

As another hurricane season begins, communities damaged by last year's devastating storms, especially Hurricane Katrina, are just scratching the surface of the massive rebuilding task before them. The effects of Katrina will be with Louisiana and other Gulf Coast states for a generation or more. It will be the largest urban and rural redevelopment our nation has ever seen.



Louisiana has already taken an important step to help prevent future damage by adopting the International Codes to guide reconstruction. With the I-Codes in place, homes and businesses in Louisiana will be safer, stronger, and more resistant to future natural disasters. What is that protection worth? Every dollar spent on prevention today will save \$4 to \$7 in future losses.

Hurricane recovery represents an opportunity to improve the quality of life for thousands of families displaced by Katrina and Rita. We cannot forget those who lost not just their homes but also their hopes and dreams. They need support from all of us to help them build new hopes and dreams and to achieve a better quality of life. And as we rebuild, we have to do it right. We cannot make mistakes.

The International Code Council is helping through education and outreach. Immediately after the state adopted the I-Codes, the ICC established a regional office in Louisiana. Our staff is assisting local jurisdictions with the adoption of the I-Codes and conducting comprehensive training workshops and seminars in locations throughout the state. We are offering new certifications to help building officials and inspectors take action after the storms. Many Louisiana communities never had building codes — or even a building department — before Katrina. The International Code Council is reaching out to those communities to help ease their transition.

As builders, you must make a commitment to help as well. You know the value of a disaster-resistant home and you know what techniques and materials can strengthen homes. Use them. Building codes should not be looked at as a burden; the codes are in place to protect your clients and you. Learning the code requirements is a small task with a large reward: better protection of our nation's coastal residents.

I can't promise that disaster won't strike again. But I can promise that steps we take today will make us better prepared for when disaster does strike. Stronger codes — codes that are followed and enforced — will promote prosperity. It takes a massive effort, but if we all stand by our commitments, we will build a safer and more disaster-resistant country.

James Lee Witt is the CEO of the International Code Council, a membership organization dedicated to building safety and fire prevention. Mr. Witt also is the CEO of James Lee Witt Associates (JLWA), a public safety and crisis management consulting firm based in Washington, D.C. JLWA is a part of GlobalOptions Group, Inc.