

It's the Law

The Web can help keep your homes code-compliant.

TRENTON WHITMAN OF AMERICAN DESIGN Build in Coarsegold, Calif., was meeting with a client to discuss a home design. The client wanted to enlarge the project, which Whitman suspected might require a larger electrical panel. Rather than thumbing through the code, he went to a Web site and got a quick answer. "It made me look like a real pro," he says.

The Web site was CodeBuddy, an online database that summarizes the 1997 Uniform Building Code. It's owned by Naffa International, a Fresno, Calif., company that does plan reviews and code-related consulting.

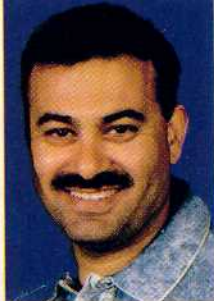
After talking with Whitman, BUILDER decided to take CodeBuddy on a test drive. Though it doesn't include a search feature, its Windows Explorer-like directory structure breaks the code down by subject, letting us quickly hone in on any requirement. And rather than the full code language (which can sound like the legal document it is) we got easy-to-understand paraphrases. Many requirements include helpful drawings, ranging from how to measure a window for egress compliance to proper locations for furnaces and water heaters. Be

aware that you'll need Internet Explorer to use this site; some of the code requirements won't even display in Netscape.

The site also hosts a building code discussion group. Company president Imad Naffa says that its 2,600 registered users include "hundreds of experts" who are willing to weigh in on code issues. "Most of what you get is opinions," he says, "but that's all we have in this business."

Sometimes it's all you need. Whitman, who also does light commercial work, needed to know the accessibility requirements for a dentist's office, so he posted the question to the list. "I got eight or 10 interpretations and brought them to the inspector," he recalls. "We were able to come to a quick result."

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT CODEBUDDY, VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT WWW.BUILDERONLINE.COM, POINT TO THE BUILDER MAGAZINE COVER, AND CLICK ON "ARTICLE REFERENCE LINKS."



PLAN CHECKER:

Imad Naffa, a civil engineer, has put the UBC online and assembled a national core of code experts to provide commentary.