



Women in Construction

Brianna Skowrya

I stumbled into my career in the construction industry many years ago. I was a good student in school, National Honor Society, Senior Poet, student athlete. I headed off to New Hampshire in the fall of 1994 to begin college for Athletic Training/Sports Medicine, but I was never content at school. I didn't find people who I connected with; the environment of college was not for me. About a week into my sophomore year of college, while sitting in Anatomy and Physiology class, I had an epiphany that this was absolutely NOT what I wanted to do. I got up and walked out of class and called home crying. I didn't know what I wanted to do as an 18-year-old, but I knew it wasn't the path that I was on.

My father was a 2nd generation carpenter, taking over the family business from his dad. I knew he had plenty of work, so I asked him if I could work with him for a while until I figured out what I wanted to do. The rest, as they say, is history. My first day of work we were putting a roof on a barn. My father told me that if I wanted the guys to respect me, I had to do the work. So up the ladder I went with a bundle of shingles. I remember getting about halfway up the ladder, and the shingles started sliding. Down they went, lesson learned. It took time to build strength, but I did it. I have the scars on my hands to prove it.

Looking back some twenty something years later, I could tell tales of challenges, disrespect, and triumphs, but we don't have enough room here for all those stories. What I will say is that I have never once regretted my decision or wished that I had chosen a different path.

I was fortunate in the area that I worked that people knew and respected my family name, so I don't think that I was faced with the same challenges that many women in the construction industry face. Even when I became a Certified Building Official, most people in the area knew of me, and knew that I knew buildings from hands on experience.

In April of 2020 I started working as a State Building Inspector, initially assigned to the MBTA. This was a whole new world to me, leaving my local area, working with new people, and learning construction types that I had very little experience with.

I was thrilled to see that most jobs I went to had women working! I was one of very few in my area. I was quite often the only woman in many of my classes. In speaking with women in male dominated industries, many of the themes are the same. There tends to be a looming wonder about opportunities given because of gender versus earning them. Women in the industry in some ways still have to prove themselves. Although the culture is changing, in many circumstances when a man shows up on a job, it's assumed that he knows what he is doing, but that isn't always the case when a woman shows up. I have caught many people working without a building permit because when I got out the car and started asking questions, nobody realized I was the Building Inspector.

My hope is that as time goes on, and we see more and more women join the industry, that this culture will begin to change. I would like to see more women realize that there are unlimited opportunities in the construction industry. As we see the numbers of people going to work in the trades drop, I would love to see more girls step up and give it a try. In many situations the only prerequisite to going to work in the industry is a willingness to work and to learn. There are so many doors open in the trades, and incredible earning potential. Right now, there are only 22 female Building Officials out of 796 in the entire Commonwealth of Massachusetts!

I recently learned about an organization that was created in 1953 to support women in construction. The National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) was started in Fort Worth TX and now has 115 Chapters and over 5500 members nationwide. There are two Massachusetts Chapters, Boston, and Greater Worcester. The core purpose of NAWIC is to strengthen and amplify the success of women in the construction industry. The association is committed to championing women to impact the direction of the construction industry. NAWIC provides education, community, and advocacy for women. For more information visit <https://www.nawic.org/>

In this issue of Codeword we are celebrating women in construction as March 5-11th 2023 was the 25th annual National Women in Construction week. We are introducing you to the women State Building Inspectors, Louise Vera, Adelle Reynolds, and myself. As you will read, we each bring a unique background and perspective to what we do. We hope that our stories will help to encourage more women to give the construction industry a try.

Adelle Reynolds



When I was a little girl, I remember watching my grandfather, who was a contractor, work. I always told him I was going to be a contractor when I grew up. When I got to high school, my parents wanted me to go to St. Bernard's High School like my sisters. I wanted to go to Leominster High so that I could take the Tech classes, but they said no. On the first day of school at St. Bernard's we were getting our classes and I wanted to take drafting, but Sister Joan said no. I went home and at dinner I told my parents if they wanted me to go to that school, they would have to come with me and tell Sister Joan that I could take drafting. They did, and I was allowed to take the class.

My senior year, my dad got transferred and we moved to Arizona. We found a house in Mesa and fortunately for me we were two streets across from a brand-new high school. We went to register, and I was able to take woodworking, mechanical, and architectural drafting. I wasn't upset about moving after that!

When I graduated, I went to Yavapai College in Prescott, Arizona. They had a couple of degrees I could work on: Solar Construction and Construction Technology. The first year of school, we built a house that the graduating class had designed. The second year we were tasked with finding a piece of property and designing a house to be constructed. I also worked for a mason. This experience exposed me to all aspects of construction.

After college I moved to Hawaii for several years. I worked with several different contractors doing architectural drawings for them. When I came back to Massachusetts it was difficult finding work doing drawings and with my love of construction and passion for the industry, it was suggested that I go to class and get my CSL. So, I found a class and took it. The instructor was a Building Official. We used to talk quite a bit after classes, and he actually suggested that I look into taking the exams to become certified as a Building Commissioner.

Twenty-seven years ago, I was hired in Douglas, MA to be a Building Commissioner. Seven years ago, I was hired as a State Building Inspector. I feel as though my time spent working for towns as a Building Inspector helps me to understand the different issues that inspectors face, including codes and zoning, and gives me the ability to help the inspectors in my district and surrounding areas.

Louise Vera



Louise Vera was raised in New Bedford in a large Portuguese American family. She started her career in the Trades in 1978 when there were very few career options explained to or even open to young women. She enrolled in the JTPA (Job Training Partnership Act) “Women in Construction” project spearheaded by President Carter with the goal of offering women and minorities jobs on federally funded construction sites. After the orientation and initial training, she joined the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America as a Carpenter’s Apprentice. Her Apprenticeship years are decorated with many of the shocking harassment stories that most female pioneers in the Trades endured, but she persevered and turned out as a Journeyman Carpenter and Locksmith.

She worked in those Trades until 1996 when she joined the Commonwealth at the Division of Capitol Asset Management and Maintenance as a Resident Engineer. Louise joined the DOL in 1997 as the first female hired in a State Building Inspector’s position. Louise has served as a Trainer/Speaker teaching many courses in Code Compliance and other relevant topics for Contractors, Building Inspectors and Fire Service. Louise earned her BA from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in 2002 and has been a Certified Building Official for 25 years. She hopes to encounter more women who are willing to work in the Trades. She understands the challenges that exist on many levels and describes it as a rewarding and financially stable career.

Guidance for Building Officials about 780 CMR 51.00, R105.3(8) and 780 CMR 105.3(8)

780 CMR 51.00, R105.3/105.3 require, among other things, the following:

Building permit “applications shall . . . 8. **If applicable**, include the registration number and information of home improvement contractors or subcontractors for residential contracting services, in accordance with M.G.L. c. 142A, §§ 9(a) and 13.” *780 CMR 105.3(8); 780 CMR 51.00, R105.3(8).*

Here’s a recommended checklist for building officials, to help them complete what 780 CMR 51.00, R105.3(8) and 780 CMR 105.3(8) directs them to do before issuing a building permit.

CHECKLIST

Does the building permit application propose work on an existing one-to-four-dwelling building (*G. L. c. 142A, § 1*)? If not, then no “person” (*G. L. c. 142A, § 1*) identified in the application is required to have a valid HIC Registration.

Identify the applicant. Is the applicant the owner/occupier of the existing dwelling/of an existing dwelling in the building (*G. L. c. 142A, § 1*)? If yes, does the owner/occupier propose performing all the Code-regulated work by itself (*G. L. c. 142A, § 1A*)? If yes, HIC Registration is not required.

If HIC Registration is required, find on the building permit application the HIC Registration number and the “contractor”, “person” (*G. L. c. 142A, § 1*) to whom the Registration number is assigned. Check the HIC Program’s database for the Registration (Go to the website for [Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation | Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/home-improvement-contractor-hic-program) and, from there, go to <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/home-improvement-contractor-hic-program> services.oca.state.ma.us/hic/licenseelist.aspx). (You may also ask the applicant for a copy of the contract, but the applicant might not offer a copy. A copy of the contract also should have the HIC Registration number and the “contractor”, “person”, to whom the Registration number is assigned. (*G. L. c. 142A, § 2*). A copy of the contract can also help verify the scope of work described in the building permit application.)

QUESTIONS FROM BUILDING OFFICIALS ABOUT 780 CMR 51.00, R105.3/105.3.

Does the HIC Registrant have to be the person who submits the building permit application?

SHORT ANSWER: NO.

If the project is subject to G. L. c. 142A, then the building permit application needs only to **identify** the HIC Registrant who is accountable for compliance with G. L. c. 142A. Although the contract between the homeowner and the HIC Registrant also must identify the HIC Registrant, it is **not** the building official's responsibility to enforce that contractual term or advise the homeowner about what should be in the contract.

The main goal of 780 CMR 105.3(8) is to have a valid HIC Registration on record for a building permit. It does not matter who pays the permit fee, or who "files" the application. Let's say a homeowner, *before* a building permit application is filed, hires someone who is supposed to hold a valid HIC Registration because that "person" will be engaged in "residential contracting" for the homeowner's project. When the permit application is submitted, the key points for the building official are: (1) determine if the "person" has a valid HIC Registration; and (2) the valid HIC Registration information appears in the building permit application and building permit records. Note the following:

"Any contract entered into between a contractor and homeowner shall require the contractor to inform the homeowner of the following: (i) any and all necessary permits, (ii) **that it shall be the obligation of the contractor to obtain said permits, and (iii) that homeowners who secure their own permits will be excluded from the guaranty fund provisions of this chapter.**" *G. L. c. 142A, § 2* (emphasis added).

G. L. c. 142A, § 2 dictates that the *contract* must obligate the "contractor" to "obtain said permits." But "obtain[ing] said permits" could mean many things. For examples: homeowner is not handling any paper work so contractor does everything; the homeowner and contractor collaborate about what's stated in the building permit application but the contractor files the application and retrieves the building permit; the homeowner makes sure that the HIC Registration information is on the building permit application and the homeowner enters into a contract (with an HIC Registrant) that complies with G. L. c. 142A, but anyone could retrieve the building permit and place it on site.

Clauses (ii) and (iii) on G. L. c. 142A, § 2 are intended to make homeowners think twice (at least) before doing all permitting processes by themselves, getting issued building permits and, *after all that, then* deciding they should hire a contractor (who should hold a valid HIC Registration if the homeowner wants any possibility of potential relief from the HIC Guaranty Fund).

To support the HIC Program’s main goal, the HIC Program wants to discourage homeowners from hiring “persons” who do **not** have valid HIC Registrations. When a homeowner hires a “person” who is required to be an HIC Registrant but is not, the homeowner will not have the potential benefit of the Guaranty Fund. *G. L. c 142A, § 13(b)* (“All building permits shall clearly state that persons contracting with unregistered contractors do not have access to the guaranty fund under this chapter.”)

By contrast, if the homeowner **is doing their own work** and **not** hiring anyone who is supposed to have a valid HIC Registration, then *G. L. c. 142A* does not apply to the building permit review.

From the Chief’s Desk



The Importance of Creating a Record

When you commit your decisions and determinations to writing, you create a written record and comply with the Building Code, section 114.2.1 “Notice Service and Content. Every notice or order authorized pursuant to 114.2 shall be in writing and shall be served on the person responsible.” Creating a record is as simple as writing your comments down on the Permit Card or in the comments section of your online software. Not only will your comments provide detailed information of your inspection, but the written comments will benefit future inspectors.

Consider the number of decisions you make in a day. The written record needs to clearly show how you arrived at your decision in each individual case. Remember, your determination is always based on information which has been provided to you. For example, if a permit application is presented with a non-compliant land survey or set of building plans, your determination to deny the building permit will be based on the date of the non-compliant plan or survey. That denial, under R105.3.1, must be in writing as required by the Code: “..... the building official shall deny such application in writing, stating the reasons, therefore.” Add a signed copy of the denial letter to the office file folder and upload a copy to the permit software.

Be mindful that your original determination can change based on additional information. Creating a complete record is important because it documents how you responded to this additional information. Determinations change based on receiving a compliant land survey or based on the receipt of a revised set of building plans and documenting the receipt of the new set of plans by writing down the date it was received is a crucial part of the decision-making record. Homeowners, contractors, lawyers, and building officials will benefit from the detailed information you have provided.

Creating a record can be as easy as dating and initialing a permit card or writing a letter denying a building permit. When you commit your determinations, decisions, and comments in writing, you create a record for future building officials and for your city or town officials to rely on.



BUILDING SAFETY MONTH 2023

It Starts with YOU!



BUILDING SAFETY IS...

PERSONAL Week 1 (May 1-7) Building Safety Starts at Home Week 2 (May 8-14) Building Safety Professionals and You	LOCAL Week 3 (May 15-21) Prepare Your Community Week 4 (May 22-28) Advocate for Your Community	GLOBAL Week 5 (May 29-31) Solving Challenges Together
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www.buildingsafetymonth.org #BuildingSafety365    

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May is Building Safety Month!

From the Executive Director of the Board of State Examiners of Electricians, Keith Gleason, regarding the new Electrical Code.

Please pass this information to your Electrical Inspector.

“The Board of Fire Prevention Regulations voted to approve the Amendments to 527 CMR 12.00 Massachusetts Electrical Code based on the 2023 edition of NFPA 70 National Electrical Code. The Electrical Code is effective as of February 17, 2023. A link to the unofficial 2023 Massachusetts Electrical Code is available here:

[527 CMR 12.00 Massachusetts Electrical Code \(Effective 2/17/23\)](#)

In addition, the Board of State Examiners of Electricians, in an effort to communicate important updates/information in the future requests that IOW’s provide a business email address by emailing the Board at: electricians.board@mass.gov. With a complete and comprehensive list, any and all advisories, emergency amendments, etc. can quickly be disseminated to the public through the city and towns.”

TO SEE PAST ISSUES OF CODEWORD CLICK HERE

[Codeword Newsletter Recent Editions | Mass.gov](#)

Do you have a topic you would like to see covered? Questions? Comments? Please send your ideas and comments to your District State Building Inspector. District Maps and contacts can be found here.

[download \(mass.gov\)](#)

OR

You can email us here, at our new email address,

BBRS-MA@mass.gov

Other new email addresses for you!

The Building Code Appeals Board, BCAB-MA@mass.gov

The Building Official Certification Committee, BOCC-MA@mass.gov

Helpful Links:

Questions about the HIC program?

Check out: <https://www.mass.gov/home-improvement-contractor-registration-and-renewal>

or email questions to Estee Ormont at estee.ormont@mass.gov.

What is a Building Official's statutory authority to require particular actions?

It may be found in Chapter 143 of the Massachusetts General Laws, available here:

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXX/Chapter143>

What work requires an HIC Registration?

A comprehensive list of work that requires an HIC Registration, Construction Supervisor's License and/or a Building Permit may be linked to here:

[Work Requiring a Home Improvement Contractor \(HIC\) Registration or Construction Supervisor License \(CSL\) for Existing Owner Occupied 1- to 4-Family Dwellings](#)

Links to Building Officials' Associations

[Massachusetts Building Commissioners & Inspectors Association \(mbcia.org\)](#)

[New England Building Officials Education Association \(neboea.org\)](#)

[Building Official - Mass. Federation of Building Officials \(mfbo.org\)](#)

[SEMBOA](#)

[Building Officials of Western Massachusetts - Home \(wildapricot.org\)](#)

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