



BY CHRISTINA FISHER

Headquartered in Herndon, Virginia, the Institute for Building Technology and Safety (IBTS) is jointly governed by the National Governors' Association, the Council of State Governments, the National Association of Counties, the National League of Cities, and the National Conference of States on Building Codes and Standards. IBTS exists to provide impartial evaluations, research and technical assistance to federal, state and local government agencies. The institute's purpose is to reduce the burden of government and fulfill its needs by improving efficiency and offering technical support.

The institute provides services in program administration, performance measurement, auditing, quality management, information technology (IT) support, housing/building regulations, and design and construction contract administration.

Two recent IBTS press releases give an indication of the scope and nature of its work.

Building Departments Report Successful Use Of IT

A May 2005 report revealing the results of a nationwide survey of 101 local building departments shows that the use of information technology has cut building processing time anywhere from 20 percent to 80 percent, saved jurisdictions thousands of dollars, and drastically improved their ability to share data and better plan for and respond to disasters and security matters.

Funded through a \$12,000 IBTS grant, the report, the first of its kind in scope, finds that 55 responding jurisdictions use IT to improve their overall relationship with jurisdictions and clients, 38 apply IT to share critical data with other agencies, 37 to offer services, and 30 to respond to, and recover from, natural and man-made disasters. Thirty-one jurisdictions reported that they are not currently using IT due to either a lack of funding or a lack of time to review how IT applications may be useful.

In general, larger jurisdictions tend to use IT programs developed in-house, or off-the-shelf software with extensive in-house revisions. Smaller jurisdictions typically purchase existing software packages and implement them within their agencies. Jurisdictions providing data ranged from large cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles to mid-sized cities such as Louisville, Ky., and Santa Clara, Calif., to a dozen smaller jurisdictions with populations of 12,000 or less.

"We recognized the value this study would have for state and local jurisdictions that are considering the

costs/benefits and savings of investing in information technology," said Greg Lindsay, IBTS head of Information Systems, under whose technical direction the survey was designed and compiled. "We hope that jurisdictions can use the information from this report to substantiate applications of IT in investments applied to building department processes."

Compiled for IBTS by the National Conference of States on Building Codes and Standards (NCSBCS), the report also shows how jurisdictions use IT in their building processes. Among them, 63 use IT in permit applications and processing, 36 in plan submittal and processing, 29 in plan review, 52 in trade licensing, and 59 in inspection scheduling.

The report also includes guidance to jurisdictions about how they can retain control of their data and how they can benefit from the experiences of other jurisdictions that have applied IT to their building department processes. A list of individuals from responding jurisdictions who may be contacted for more information is also provided.

For more information on the report, please contact Greg Lindsay at IBTS (703) 481-2023, or view the report online at the IBTS website.

IBTS To Do Third-Party Plan Review, Inspections

Washington, D.C.'s Building and Land Regulation Administration has accepted IBTS to conduct third-party plan reviews and inspections for the city. Prince George's County Dept. of Environmental Resources (DER) has approved IBTS to conduct third-party plan reviews.

IBTS has been certified to conduct plan reviews and inspections for code compliance in the mechanical, plumbing, electrical, elevator, construction, and architectural/structural plan reviews areas in Washington, D.C. Prince George's County has approved IBTS to conduct plan peer review in the building, mechanical and electrical areas.

With an expert staff of over 12 licensed engineers and architects certified in all ICC inspection disciplines, IBTS also provides expedited plan reviews and inspections for Fairfax County, Arlington County, Fauquier County, and the cities of Falls Church, Alexandria and Manassas.

Recognized as a government entity, IBTS, a not-for-profit (501)(c)(3) corporation, has a fully qualified staff of 45 inspectors, plans examiners and code officials. Staff can often complete expedited plan reviews and inspections in three days to one week, saving builders and developers up to 10 weeks in review time. ■

For more information about IBTS, visit www.ibts.org.