

# Composites

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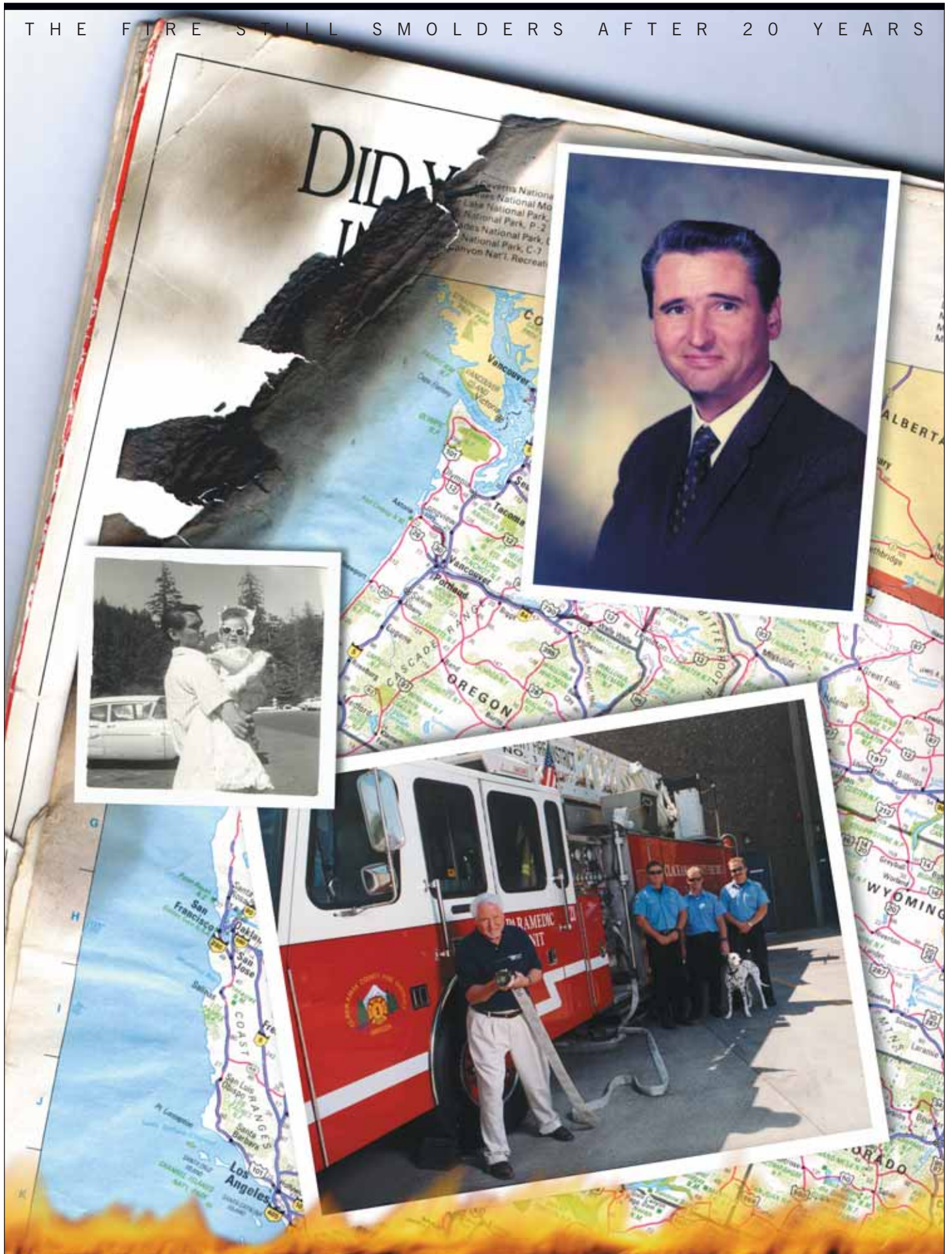
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## Lowell Miles Stoking a Fire Code for the Industry

### How it Looks: Appearance Science Empowering Fabricators Smart About Smart Structures







# The Slow Burn of Lowell Miles:



## How a Man From Oregon Stoked a Fire Code for the Composites Industry

By Andrew Rusnak  
Editor, *Composites Fabrication Magazine*

*Think about the mix—small business owners, a relatively new industry, chemicals, government regulators, and public misconception. There are challenges peculiar to entrepreneurs in the composites industry. A regulator knocks on the door, slips past the security of foresight and prevention, and cites unsafe practices that threaten business. Debate ensues. The code is unclear, based on the practices of other industries. An issue is born, grows, reinvigorates the lost art of long-term commitment to principle. Business leaders find a common cause. Exposed: the sometimes sticky inadequacy of bureaucratic institutions. Revealed: advantages of membership in organizations like the Composites Fabricators Association. Learned: the importance of being involved in regulatory policy from the beginning.*

*You see, the farmer's barn caught fire, started in a place no one thought to look, and the neighbors rushed to put it out. The farmer repaired the damage, but the fire still smolders after 20 years.*

Introduced as a new member of the Technical Committee on Finishing Processes, part of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), Lowell Miles was asked to stand and explain his interest in the organization as well as how he came to be on the committee. It was a hot, humid morning, February of 1986, a Disney hotel in Orlando. Miles had made the trek from Oregon, where he started Miles Fiberglass & Composites (MFC) in 1963. But his interest in NFPA, specifically Chapter 33 of the code which signals the standard for spray application using flammable or combustible materials, started with a knock on his shop door on March 8, 1978.

“Well, we in the fiberglass industry feel there's a need for some changes in the

NFPA standard,” Miles said, addressing the body of some 20 committee members. “We don't think the standard fits what we do, and we're looking for some relief.”

There was a stir in the room and Miles thought he detected a few undermining chuckles and snorts. By now he was used to uphill battles. Deeply entrenched, the original NFPA standard on paint spraying and spray booths was initiated in 1921, 16 years before Miles was born. A few hard-fought changes have prevailed over the years, but the NFPA 33 board is made up primarily of those in the fire protection business and insurance industry, with a sprinkling of members from the world of manufacturing. Miles went on to recount the events leading up to his interest in the committee, a chain reaction started 21



years ago when an OSHA inspector stopped by his Portland, Oregon shop unannounced for a surprise inspection.

“Oh, so you think you’re going to come in here and change the code huh!” thundered a voice from the front of the room.

“I don’t know what makes fiberglass any different from spray finishing,” another added. “It’s probably worse. We’ve seen all these nasty records of fires that have gone on in your industry. Don’t think there’s going to be any changes for fiberglass made to this code.”

Not an easy task facing down a group of 20 decision-makers, all with their minds made up. But this was just the latest round in a long fight to establish universal criteria based on hard test data, a bout that started eight years hence and continues to this day.

On the early side of 6am, Boise, Idaho time, CFA President Gary Multanen was on his way to work when he had a notion.

As he maneuvered his ’94 Suburban through Interstate 84, he pulled out a cell phone, pressed in the number for CFA headquarters, and accessed the magazine editor’s voice mail.

“Andy, this is Gary Multanen. I want to chat with you briefly on the international fire code. You probably already have the details. I’ll be in my vehicle for the next 15 minutes, then I’ll be at the office for about an hour before I have to leave again.”

I spotted the red blinking voice-mail light when I returned from the copy machine, and dialed Multanen’s cell phone.

“I don’t want to seem like I’m telling the editor how to do his job ...” he kidded before hesitating. “But I’ve got an idea for a story.”

“That’s ridiculous,” I clamored. “I count on you for good leads.”

Then I knew he knew I’d respond that way. Good stories are like Snickers bars, or at least like buttered toffee from the Idaho Candy Company.

Multanen cracked one of his quick, ‘potato spud’ grins before briefly outlining the tale of Lowell Miles’ long involvement with the Fire Code. The two have been friends for 27 years.

“He was up against huge red tape,” said Multanen, sprinkling the rest of his story with comments like, “The little guy prevailed here.”

I made some notes and started planning the story. About a week later, Miles stopped into CFA’s Arlington, Virginia-headquarters for a meeting.

“I guess you know Gary gave me a lead on a story about you?” I shouted as he passed by my office.

After a slow about-face, I noticed a heavy dose of curiosity spinning behind his dark eyes. Miles was unsure what to make of the question.

“No,” I didn’t,” he replied.

“About the fire code?” I tried again.

“Oh,” Miles chuckled cautiously, quickly sorting out the implications like a skilled negotiator. There was his friend Gary, with whom he’d shared many an adventurous prank. And there was the thought that the sometimes tumultuous, politically sensitive history of the fire code would be plastered all over *Composites Fabrication* magazine.

Finally, it struck him as an OK idea, even had fun with it.

“One of the first meetings I went to, I basically got laughed out of the room,” he chortled. “And at the last meeting, when NFPA passed the Fire Code, they said they were tired of arguing with that gray-haired old bastard.”

*I once heard Lowell give an update on fire code status at a CFA board meeting. He said, ‘It’s not that tough getting things done. You simply get appointed to the committee and outlive everyone else.’*  
— Steve McNally, CFA’s Director of Industry Affairs

From 50 miles west and southwest at Portland’s International Airport, Mount Hood and the incorrigible Mount St Helens hold their prowess peacefully over the landscape. They appear liquid in the distance of a warm, Spring day, while everything close and peripheral is delivered sharp, crisp, affable.

Dressed in white khakis and a brown print shirt, Lowell Miles meets me at the

airport gate. It’s a fairly short plane ride but a hard contrast in air quality from Los Angeles.

As we walk to his glimmering, silver-gray, 1999 Corvette, I think about 20 years ago, a lateral explosion, disjointed images on TV news. The flannel shirt tranquility of what the Northwest is—panorama personified, distant escapes—suddenly ruptured, and far-off beauty was thrown in everyone’s face. Mount St



Helens sprays ash, gases, and hot, blistering rock 150 square miles into the surrounding area. Fifty-seven people are killed. Three days later, some of the ash makes its way to the East Coast, particulate warnings of nature’s cyclic fury, her need to purge, change the rules.

Miles signals, punches the Vette into the fast lane, explains how the heads-up display works. His is a Huck Finn curiosity for machines and where they can take you, often back to a time when sitting in the driver’s seat meant nurturing a symbiotic relationship with leather interior and an internal combustion engine—reaching for power through style, reaching for style through power. Later I’d see, decorating the conference room shelves at Miles Fiberglass & Composites, replica models of a 1954, 300SL Mercedes Benz, a B-17 bomber, a motorized “Whizzer” bike, and—judging by the twinkling enthusiasm by which Miles recounts a story around the lunch table at GGs—his favorite, a P51 Mustang.

“Gary [Multanen] came out a few weeks ago, we were heading up through the mountains,” he says, sporting along in the

fast lane. “He was driving and the road was slick from rain. We headed around a turn, started to slide, and the traction control kicked in grabbed the road.”

The same twinkle, the same smile and short chuckle when something works like it’s supposed to, or when he makes it work through innovation and perseverance.

As Miles explains how traction control detects the slide and reduces the car’s acceleration, I recall a story he once told me on a train to Baltimore, how he and Multanen picked up a reproduction of a 1929 Mercedes Benz Roadster in Charlotte, North Carolina and drove it back to Boise, Idaho. The car broke down 17 times. Miles had to bail in Denver to make a meeting in Portland, so he jumped on a plane and left Multanen to sweat the last 600 miles himself.

We reach Miles Fiberglass & Composites on Southeast Ottey Road just southeast of Portland. Low, set snugly in a pocket of fir and maple trees, the plant has a small town feel. Offices are newly renovated, and out in the shop there’s a huge sign that reads: *Our Goal is to have the Cleanest, Safest, Most Organized Fiberglass Shop in the World.*

We make our way to the conference room, and the man with the easy-going demeanor and hard-wired determination tells the story of the fire code.

*Managers have three options when confronted with an OSHA inspector. One solution is to foot the bill. The second is to fight [OSHA] in the courts ... but this also is not cheap ... generally about \$10,000. [The] third possibility is in joining your competitors and friends in the industry and presenting information to the OSHA people and probably hiring a lawyer to show you are serious.*

—Industrial Hygienist Arthur Schoenborn in a 1980 letter to Miles and other fiberglass fabricators

Two years before Mount St Helens, on the rainy, overcast morning of March 8, 1978, Lowell Miles walked to the reception area of his Oregon City plant and shook hands with a man who introduced himself as a representative from Oregon’s OSHA office.

“I’m here to conduct an inspection,” the man said amiably, but with some detachment.

For the next four hours, Miles escorted the inspector around the enterprise he’d spent years building, the seeds of which were planted at the 1957 Portland Boat Show where, killing time on a Saturday afternoon, Miles was drawn to the glossy flare of a 14-foot fiberglass fishing boat, the only sea craft at the show not made of wood. He raced home and pleaded with his father to tear down the barn behind the family’s ACME Cabinet Shop so he could start a business. Hubert Earl Miles looked at his 19-year old son’s determined face and remembered him as a scrappy five year old, hauling ice in a wagon to sell to neighbors, and, later, peddling rides on an old work horse for a nickel and hawking watermelons in the front yard. Consent given, with the help of his brother-in-law, the old barn came down and an oversized garage went up: “Glass Craft Products.” Since then, a number of expansions, relocations, dissolutions and restarts. Miles was just recovering from the oil crisis of the mid-70s when OSHA came knocking.

“The inspector said we needed explosion-proof wiring and lights, extra hazardous sprinkling systems, certain regulated air

flows at a hundred feet per minute, and spray booths to laminate everything,” Miles recalls, his historian’s memory replete with dire facts as well as comic, anecdotal spins. “He said all fiberglass shops were going to have to do this and we were operating illegally.”

Upgrade costs to satisfy the Spray Finishing code may have closed his doors for good. When he built the plant, he knew the regulations for fire hazards, but was unaware of a spray finishing code. Estimates in 1980 put the cost of upgrading FRP businesses to OSHA standards at \$35-\$40 a square foot. Current estimates put the figure at \$70-\$80.

“I told the inspector I didn’t agree, that I wanted to voice my objection at an informal hearing, which was my right,” said Miles. “Then, I contacted other shops, told them what was going on, and invited them to the hearing.”

Nearly one month to the day later, the afternoon of the hearing, Oregon OSHA representatives in their downtown Portland office were somewhat taken aback when Miles marched in with five area shop owners, all with a vested interest in the outcome.

“This is improper,” claimed one of the government OSHA reps, nervously sensing a power shift.

“Are there any laws against it?” Miles calmly queried.

“Well, no.... It’s just people usually show up with legal representation, not other business owners,” was the answer.

“Then this is how I want to do it.”

Miles stood firm before launching into a dynamic explanation why the fiberglass industry is different than spray finishing.

“We don’t create anywhere near 25 percent of the LEL (low explosive level), or the LFL (low flammable level),” he debated, positioning himself. “Therefore, we shouldn’t be treated the same.”

By the time the meeting ended, the men from OSHA were only partly convinced, restricted to myopic interpretations of the code. Miles sought to bump the controversy to the next level and called for a meeting with Darrell Douglas, head of Oregon OSHA at the time and Administrator for the Accident Prevention Division. Meanwhile, during the interim, Miles’ posse, with hired legal counsel, formed the Oregon Reinforced Plastics Association (ORPA), a group with growing political clout. A year of uncertainty went by before the meeting with Douglas was arranged.

“I agree with your proposition,” he told the Miles-led ORPA in February of ‘79, after listening to their argument, “but, before I can challenge anything I need test results or hard evidence that proves this out.”

ORPA was encouraged by Douglas’ promising attitude toward the group’s efforts. Now all they needed was hard data to prove their point and they’d be home free. *Spray applications in the FRP industry do not generate the same hazards as spray applications for which OSHA’s regulations were written.*

Once again, Miles took the lead.

Two years and three months after the initial OSHA inspection, on June 8, 1980, Mile’s Oregon City Plant became the site of emissions tests conducted by an independent, industrial hygiene consultant group hired by ORPA.

“The highest exposure rate we could come up with was 650 PPM (parts per million) which is way higher than any shop operates and no where near even 25 percent of low explosive levels,” said Miles of the testing that day.

Results were crunched, formalized, and presented to Oregon OSHA. At a follow-up meeting in November of the same year, it was decided ORPA and Oregon OSHA would sit down and write a new section for the OSHA code to cover the composites industry. By February of 1981, the new code was accepted, and Douglas, who'd witnessed the testing, offered his weight for the group's push on the regional and national levels. From that first inspection at Mile's plant three years ago, till now, it'd been an uphill, but not insurmountable climb. State officials, leery at first, were open to clarifying one of their own findings that'd been contested. It seemed the path was now clear. There was access to hard data. "I personally observed these tests and am convinced they are accurate and can be produced," wrote Industrial Hygienist Arthur Schorenborn.

But, Oregon OSHA was just the beginning. Up ahead, a more formidable bureaucratic morass awaited the efforts of Miles and ORPA.

**“W**e need to have Region 10 buy off on this,” Douglas told Miles, after members of his office and ORPA agreed on a new Oregon OSHA code that would apply to fiberglass fabricators.

Riding high on their recent victory, ORPA requested a meeting with OSHA representatives of Region 10, a jurisdiction that covers the western states, and has override authority on proposed rule changes.

“For two years we tried to get a meeting, and frankly we were stonewalled,” remembers Miles, still feeling the bite of that frustration some 18 years later.

As he tells the story in his newly renovated conference room, it's not hard to see that frontier grit and wagon train persistence is still the best formula for Lowell Miles to get things done. He's a restless, get-out-and-do-it elder townsman, a nostalgia not lost in the Northwestern United States despite the encroaching cloister of information-age work cubicles fizzling with can't-make-a-difference, non-activist apathy.

“So, we called Mark Hatfield's Office, who was our Senator at the time,” he continued. “And his field people called Region 10, and all of a sudden we got a meeting right away.”

The stage was set. Livelihoods squirmed in the balance, millions of dollars for the FRP industry were at stake.

“There must have been 25 people,” Miles recalls. “We had our group there, Darrell Douglas and Oregon OSHA was there, along with OSHA representatives from Washington, California, and Idaho. Federal OSHA was also there.”

Miles digresses to relate how, at the meeting, tempers flared and a good ole' fashioned barnyard donnybrook threatened to turn the proceedings into a ruckus, as some federal OSHA officials sided with fabricators while several regional reps grew more hesitant. He breaks into raucous laughter at the scene before returning to the eventual outcome of the meeting.

“The crux of the meeting was that we still needed federal approval, but Region 10 allowed us to go ahead and operate.”

Miles and the other ORPA reps left feeling optimistic. And by the middle of the following year, May 18, 1984, William Brown, then Director of Workers' Compensation at Oregon OSHA, received a letter from Regional Administrator, Ronald Tsunehara, stating, “... Oregon's safety and health standard relating to reinforced plastics manufacturing has been reviewed by the Regional Office of Technical Support [and] determined there is no comparable federal standard in effect and that, therefore, the state standard exceeds the federal requirement.”

“Everyone was ecstatic about the letter,” Miles beamed.

Fabricators in Oregon could now operate without spending thousands on upgrades test results proved they didn't need. The six-year struggle of organizing interest groups, writing letters, researching regulations, debating positions, setting up and conducting tests, calling politicians and wrestling with bureaucracy—a string of cause and effect events that started with one knock on one door by one inspector—all seemed to pay off.

Jubilation proved short lived, however. Nine months later, Federal OSHA completed its technical evaluation of FRP spray operations. An internal memorandum, dated February 1, 1985, addressed to Bruce Hillenbrand, then Director of Federal-State Operations in Washington, DC, outlined seven “differences” of which when “rectified, and [when] this standard is used to supplement Oregon's equivalent to 29 CFR 1910, then the ‘Reinforced Plastics Manufacturing’ standard should be at ‘at least as effective’ as the Federal standard.”

Signed by Thomas Seymour, Director of the Office of Fire protection, the seven differences focused on storage of flammable and combustible materials, automatic sprinklers, explosion-proof exhaust motors in ventilation ducts, maintaining explosion-proof equipment within 20 feet of any spray area, and requiring “explosion-proof electrical equipment within three feet of the floor and fifteen feet of the nozzle of the resin applicator within ten minutes of completion of application.”

Despite endorsements from the Oregon State Fire Marshall back in October of '83, Oregon OSHA, and Region 10 OSHA, and despite Oregon and Region 10 OSHA agreeing with three of the Feds' findings, and even after a second evaluation by the National office, “unless the remaining four areas are also changed,” wrote Seymour again in August of '85, “the Oregon standard will *still* not be ‘at least as effective’ as the Federal standard (editor's italics).”

It was time for Lowell Miles to plead his case in Washington, DC. Meanwhile, Fire Marshals and OSHA inspectors were invading fiberglass shops all over the country.

## Prometheus Revisited

What the ancient Greek poets don't tell you is the entire story.

Prometheus, chained to the rocky peak of Caucasus by Zeus for giving man the gift of fire, had more than one strange visitor...

*One overcast day, off in the distance, Prometheus spotted an Olympic-sized flame in a fiberglass torch borne high by a gray-haired man with a goatee. Bored with MTV, he thumbed-off the music videos with his remote and watched the man.*

*‘Hmm,’ the Titan speculated. “Obviously mortal. Anything with God-power would be here in minutes, but it'll take him at least a day on the long, windy path to reach the top of this mountain.”*

*The God thought he spotted a gleaming 1999 Corvette with two canoes on the roof parked near the lookout next to a couple of SUCs (sport utility chariots). But he wasn't sure. After studying the man's deceptively determined stride, Prometheus lost interest, ordered a pizza and a six-pack, and fell asleep.*

*The next morning, before opening his eyes, he felt the warm blanket of the sun spread over his body.*

*‘Ah, maybe Zeus pities me after all,’ he thought. ‘Feels like a bright day on top of the*



*old mountain. Good for catching rays and tanning up this pale, ethereal skin of mine. The future looks bright, now ... where did I put my shades...'*

*But instead of the sun, when he opened his eyes he saw the source of the heat was the bright torch held aloft by the gray haired man. He'd traveled all night to make it up the mountain, and was leaning patiently against a nearby rock. Under the man's toga, Prometheus could clearly see boxer briefs and a maroon sweatshirt that read, 'Fire Code by COMPOSITES 99 or Burn!'*

*"What can I do for you?" the God asked, wiping the sleep from his eyes and checking the still gray skies.*

*"Well," said the man, "I've come to give this back to you."*

*"What do you mean?" chuckled Prometheus, forethought escaping him for the moment.*

*"The fire," the man replied. "We don't need it any more."*

*"What?" the God's ire was easily raised. "You know how much trouble I went through to get you that fire. I lost everything—my lava villa on Mt. Kilauea, a personal recording of Ring of Fire by Johnny Cash, and my Harley Davidson custom XL with flames painted on the gas tank."*

*"Look," the man said, "I know you're the savior of mankind and all that, but we worked pretty hard at saving ourselves, since you've been chained up to this rock for so long. We don't need it anymore"*

*Prometheus, angry, struggled to break free from his chains as the man lashed the fiberglass torch to the rock. High atop Mt. Olympus, Zeus laughed royally as he watched the scene.*

*"O I almost forgot to tell you," the man said as he turned to walk away. "This mountain is being replaced with a fiberglass model, a hybrid structural resin system. It's better against the elements and it'll last longer, since you're gonna be here awhile."*

*Prometheus sat down, disgusted with his loss of powers and with man now doing for himself.*

*As he watched the man head in the direction of Portland singing, I fell into a burning ring of fire I went down, down, down, and the flames went higher...' Prometheus shouted, "If you see Hercules, send him up." But the man paid him no mind and went on his way.*

Two weeks before Thanksgiving, 1985, Lowell Miles glanced out the ground floor window of a small waiting area at OSHA headquarters in Washington, DC.

He was told to wait there, that the Director of Federal-State Operations, Bruce Hillenbrand, would be down shortly.

It'd been three months since Miles received a copy of Seymour's report rejecting a request that FRP fabrication be regulated by different criteria than other industries when it comes to spray application. By now he couldn't help wondering how much longer it was all going to take. It appeared obvious. Given quantifiable and conclusive test results verified by local government officials and independent industrial hygienists, FRP spray application does not generate the same threat as other industries regulated by OSHA.

"Actually, we don't write the spray finishing code," Hillenbrand told Miles that day in Washington. "We follow and adopt NFPA 33. What I'd suggest, if you really want to change things, is get on the NFPA committee."

The meeting with Hillenbrand was kept short, but when he left OSHA, Miles' can-do spirit percolated again. He went back to Oregon and, with the help of the Composites Fabricators Association (CFA), started lobbying for a spot on the NFPA 33 committee. As he worked his way down the list of members, he put in a call to the only composites industry representative on the board.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "I've never been to a meeting," Miles chuckles, leaning back in his conference room chair. Miles likes to softly emulate dialog when he tells a story. "He said, 'I just haven't had time to go.'"

Ironically, for years, the FRP industry was without representation in an organization that had a strong say in its destiny. Costly assumptions about the universal applicability of spray hazards proliferated. CFA formally applied for a spot at the NFPA table, and when the bid was accepted, sent Miles who'd just served a term as the association's president.

"I thought we'd be able to get the changes we needed in the NFPA 33 Standard in about a year," Miles reflects.

By the time he finished introducing himself to the NFPA 33 Committee at his first meeting in February of '86, absorbing a barrage of stinging questions and half-squashed snickers and jeers, Lowell Miles knew he'd be in for another long haul.

From the well-manicured lawn of Lowell Miles cabin retreat just over the Oregon State line in Washington's Cowlitz

County, it's easy to follow bald eagles diving on the Kalama river for steelhead.

"Yesterday I saw two fishermen in a drift boat pull a steelhead out of the river that must've been 30 inches," Miles relishes.

When Mount St Helens erupted, the Kalama clogged with mud and debris, a disruption that reached deep into the ecological balance and lasted for sometime.

Lowell Miles likes to frame conversations in series of stories. An opening presents itself, he sets a stage, tracks the plot line and sprinkles head-shaking humor on the ending. Stories are told anywhere; in his car or office, or sitting at the lunch table eating omelets at GG's where he interrupts his train of thought to talk town politics with a man across the room. Get involved, make a difference, support the citizen's creed, Lowell Miles is active on many fronts—boards, councils, and committees—from the board at Clackamas Community College, to the Jobs Plus and Rotary Club Past Presidents committees.

If he wasn't in the fiberglass business, it'd be easy to see him heading up a restoration team to save vintage aircraft for a local museum, or teaching history to high school seniors who hated history before they took Mr. Miles' class.

*Long after the flames were extinguished, the farmer felt gratitude toward his neighbors. During several interviews for this story, Lowell Miles kept reiterating the importance of teamwork in the overall effort to establish an industry standard. So much so, in fact, that when he reads the headline for this article, the first thing he'll wonder is if others are mentioned.*

**S**tyrene Cross-Linked Composites Manufacturing, Chapter 15 of the current NFPA Standard for Spray Application Using Flammable or Combustible Materials, has 607 words. It took Lowell Miles ten years to write and revise them enough to satisfy the NFPA 33 board, much longer than it took his Grandparents to cross the Oregon Trail from Missouri in the late 1870s. That works out to approximately 60 words a year, about 14 less than are in this paragraph.

During that time he inundated committee members with background information on FRP materials, as well as results of booth burning and emissions tests. He even

guided tours through fiberglass shops to acclimate those unfamiliar with FRP fabrication practices.

"We got Chapter 14 changed a little bit, in 1992," said Miles. "Not nearly what we wanted, but it was a small victory. You can sit in one of these meetings and talk about one word for an hour-and-a-half. I actually got to be an old timer on the committee. I was on it longer than anyone."

Finally, in 1995, committee members became convinced and voted to add the 607 words to cover the FRP industry. But, NFPA was not the only jurisdictional authority for spray finishing regulations. Simultaneous to adding Chapter 15, Miles, with the help of Pat Franzen, a former Oregon Fire Chief, worked to change the Uniform Fire Code sponsored by the International Fire Code Institute (IFCI) and pushed by the Western Fire Chiefs Association (WFCA). Little by little, bucket by bucket, Miles sought to put out flaming misconceptions about the fiberglass industry in a handful of powerful and competing organizations responsible for dictating fire codes. Shortly after Chapter 15 had been approved and an apparent precedent established, similar guidelines came up for a vote at the next Uniform Fire Code meeting. With strong objections from California and Arizona Fire Chiefs, the proposal was blocked by one vote.

"Right before the next meeting, the Arizona representative introduced his own chapter to cover the FRP industry, and it was worse than the original spray finishing code," Miles said, holding an even voice. "We caught wind of it, and didn't have anyone there to speak on our behalf. So I jumped on a plane for Spokane along with ORPA attorney Jim Watts, got there the day they were gonna bring it up in the meeting, spent two hours looking for the Executive Director. I told him, 'According to Jim here, we have good cause to file a lawsuit if this goes through. We had no input whatsoever.' He said he'd take care of it, and he did."

Ironically, the Executive Director responsible for the Uniform Fire Code, Jeff Shapiro, resigned shortly afterwards and was retained by CFA to consult. Shapiro became instrumental in lobbying for approval of FRP interests in the International Fire Code (IFC). The IFC is an attempt by the International Code Council (ICC) to streamline fire code

development under one umbrella group, thus unifying competing economic interests among organizations that sell fire code literature. With Miles and CFA's Senior Government Affairs Director, John Schweitzer standing by to answer questions posed by some of the same litigious fire chiefs who sit on the committee for the Uniform Fire Code,

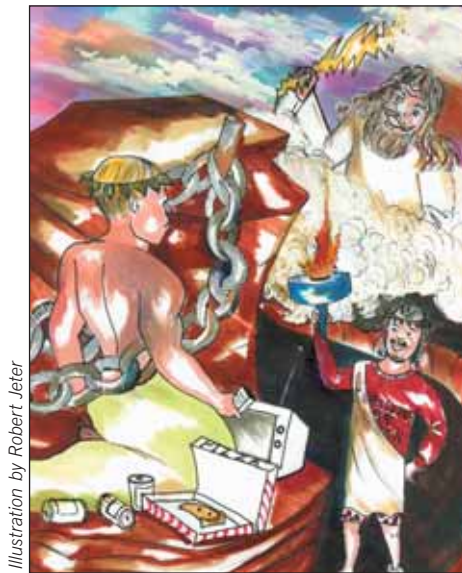


Illustration by Robert Jeter

the IFC was given the thumbs up last February in Los Angeles. Elevated to the Select Committee a month later, it was approved unanimously. Unfortunately, even though the intention was to have the IFC supercede all fire codes, several groups have dropped out and will continue their independent efforts.

"I understand now the Uniform Fire Code isn't going to be part of the International Fire Code," Miles says. "We have a battle brewing there, still a lot of work to do."

As the interview ends, Lori Luchak, Miles' daughter and vice president of the 90-employee MFC, appears at the conference room door. A state regulator that morning caught another fiberglass shop in the area off-guard with a surprise inspection, she informs her father. Miles pitches a sideways smile at the irony and at the daughter he negotiated with an obstetrician two fiberglass canoes to deliver into the world. Family and family history nourishes the man who can imagine his grandparents huddled around campfires along the Oregon Trail, which ends one block from his Oregon City Plant. Jake and Mary met and wedded on that trail, eventually

settling in Idaho to farm. (Miles, of course, is on the Oregon Trail Foundation Board.) Son in-law Joe Luchak is general manager at MFC, and Miles' corporate secretary wife, Janet joined her husband and daughter after lunch for a meeting on employee training strategies.

Miles hustles off to catch-up to a few phone calls. When he returns, we make the drive through pristine communities—calm, green foliage lounging on naturally landscaped lawns swimming in the lucid, Oregon sunshine, Northwest rain relegated to myth, at least on this day—till we get to GG's Family Diner.

*Lowell Miles has long led the industry's efforts to develop reasonable and effective fire protection requirements for composites manufacturing facilities. For the first time, these facilities now have specifically tailored requirements critical for their success.*

—John Schweitzer, CFA's Senior Director of Government Affairs, who sat on the NFPA committee and assisted the industry's efforts from 1993-Present

Mount St Helens continues to Mshake—five to ten tremors daily. And experts point to the possibility of another major disruption. Oregon and the Northwest, it seems, is still a place that grants its citizens the life-giving promise of life-threatening unexpected encounters, and what they can teach you.

"You always feel kind of threatened by what the government can do to you," Miles reflects. "It's better to try and be involved in the process before you become regulated unfairly and have to undo things that've already been done. But if that's not possible, you still can get involved and make a difference. You still can influence political thinking." —CFA

*Andrew Rusnak is Editor of Composites Fabrication.*

*The Editor would like to thank Lori Luchak and Janell Kaneaster for their help with this article.*