016: Third-Party Inspection Program with Rick Hinson, PE

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Intro

Steve

Steve Gosselin:

Welcome to Coffee Talk: From The Ground Up, an ECS podcast, where we strive to provide a more personable way to communicate with employees. I'm Steve Gosselin, but you can call me Goose, and I'm part of our Senior Leadership Team, and I'm joined here by Julie Smith, who is part of the Marketing Communications Team, and our resident chocoholic. Say hi, Julie.

Julie Smith:

Thanks, Steve. Hey everyone, I'm glad you're joining us today. So, Steve, what are we doing here?

Steve Gosselin:

Great question, Julie. One of the struggles with the company our size is getting a message to the masses without it being diluted along the way. From projects and people, to services and career insight, we hope this podcast helps provide an avenue to communicate the stories that are worth sharing. It's to learn about our culture, and feel more connected, and to have some fun along the way.

Julie Smith:

So what you're saying is, we hope this podcast is educational, entertaining, and encouraging, with practical advice you can apply directly to your work and life.

Steve Gosselin:

Well said, Julie, and that's why you're in marketing.

Julie Smith:

So grab a cup, and settle in. Our attorney makes us say this. This podcast is for entertainment and informational purposes only. Nothing herein shall be construed as providing professional engineering services, or used to establish the standard of care. This podcast and the comments contained therein represent only the personal views of the participants and do not reflect those of ECS. While we make every effort to ensure that the information we are sharing is accurate, we welcome any comments, suggestions, or correction of errors.

Steve Gosselin:

Good morning, everybody. Welcome to Coffee Talk: From The Ground Up. Good morning, Julie.

Julie Smith:

Good morning.

Steve Gosselin:

So we'll start with a safety minute, and today I'm going to talk about distracted driving. Distracted driving occurs anytime you take your eyes off the road, hands off the wheel, and/or mind off your primary task, which is driving safely. Any non-driving activity you engage in is a potential distraction and increases your risk of being involved in a motor vehicle accident. Workers in many industries and occupations spend all or part of their work days on the road. One study showed that compared with other drivers, those who were at work were more likely to be in a hurry to reach their destination, think about work, be tired, or use a cell phone.

Steve Gosselin:

So there are three main types of driving distractions. One is visual distractions. Examples are reading a text message or email, looking up directions while driving, or rubber necking at a crash site and staring and trying to see what happened. There are manual distractions, reaching for things inside the vehicle, and that would include eating or drinking, things like that, using a handheld device, adjusting the radio or your climate control, or applying makeup. Cognitive distractions include talking on the phone, arguing or having a discussion with a passenger, or thinking about your next appointment, projecting and thinking ahead, not paying attention to what's going on.

Steve Gosselin:

So research has shown that drivers who are distracted while driving may be looking at, but failing to see, up to 50% of the information in their driving environment. Usually, the driver's field of view is narrowed to what is directly in front of them. As a result, the missing 50% of information may include a stop sign, a stopped vehicle, or a child. So my suggestion is to limit as many distractions as possible before you start driving. So that's our safety minute today.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah, good morning, everyone. I'd like to welcome Rick Hinson today. Rick joined ECS in 2018, he's currently a Facilities Department Manager in our Christiansburg, Virginia office. When he is not working, he can be found working on the farm, building scale models, or behind a rifle in competitive shooting competition. Before we got started, Rick and I were also talking about working in the garden and tilling, he got a new tiller this weekend. It's finally warm enough in the Virginia mountains where he lives to where he can probably start to work in the soil and getting ready, although I bet it was pretty chilly this morning, wasn't it, Rick?

Rick Hinson:

It was a bit chilly. It was a bit chilly over the weekend too, but you stand behind a tiller long enough and the chill goes away.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah, you got that, right, absolutely. Yeah, sometimes that's like wrestling a pig, working a tiller, depending on the soil you're working with. We'll get started and warmed up here, and we'll get some rapid fire questions going for you. Rick, what's your favorite food?

Rick Hinson:

Normally steak off the grill, some grilled vegetables to go with it.

Steve Gosselin:

Awesome. Yeah. I'm there with you. Favorite sport or hobby?

Rick Hinson:

You already introduced, I'm a firearms competitor, so I shoot several different things for competition, and history goes along with that.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah, so tell me a little bit about history, just history in general? Or do you have something that you really focus on or really enjoy?

Rick Hinson:

Well, I grew up in Williamsburg, and I worked for Colonial Williamsburg, so Virginia history from the Revolutionary period up through about 1865, 1870, is where I normally put my head.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. Okay. Well you're right in the heart of it too, there really is some good stuff. I can remember as a young child going to Williamsburg and how fascinated I was with all that. So yeah, good for you. What job would you be terrible at?

Rick Hinson:

Any job that pretty much puts me all by myself with very few challenges.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. I could appreciate that. Yeah, no doubt. What are you addicted to?

Rick Hinson:

My faith and my wife.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah, there you go. Good answer there. What is something most people don't know about you?

Rick Hinson:

I used to be, actually, in the theater. I worked all day at my engineering office and then I'd go work many, many hours at a theater. I was a president, a producer, a director, set and light designer, and actor, singer, dancer, and stage manager. It does well now because now I do a lot of teaching, all that stuff paid off, even now.

Steve Gosselin:

Okay. You kind of answered the question I was going to ask you, but embellish a little bit more, how has all of that helped or enhanced or helped you get where you are? Or helped you with your career, with what you're doing right now?

Rick Hinson:

Well, when you live in the theater, you become very accustomed to dealing with people, very accustomed to working with people. All those things I did, from president, all the way through to being an actor. It teaches how to be in front of people and be confident, regardless of what's going on. And you also have to learn how to, literally, dance on your feet, because we know in this job that we have, construction doesn't go the way you think it's going to go, every day. So you end up having to be able to think quickly and think on your feet. And being in the theater, it was live theater, it wasn't film, it was live theater, so you're doing the same thing. And of course, now I teach. I teach codes for the Commonwealth of Virginia, and that's just the place to be, an actor, I'm out front, teaching, and being in front of people, and it's great fun.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. Great, great answer. I love it. That's great. Tell us your ECS story. How'd you get here? A little bit about your career, and then since you've been here, how you've progressed to what you're doing now?

Rick Hinson:

Well, I started in the field of codes, of course I graduated Virginia Tech as an engineer, worked a number of places, one of which was Virginia Power. But I left Virginia Power, went to work for James City County, which is over on the East side of Virginia. At that point, I got into code compliance, building code compliance, and enjoyed it. But from there I got a job with another private firm, so I left James City County, went to a private firm, was actually a principal in that private firm, did that for about a decade. And the third party work I was doing was code work, when I was in that private firm, and I'm shoving all this into a thumbnail.

Rick Hinson:

From there, of course we had 2008, and we all remember what happened in 2008. So I left that private firm and I went to Virginia Tech, back to Virginia Tech, and became the building official at Virginia Tech. I was there about a decade, a little short, and finally decided that I needed to go back out into the private world, and started looking around, and real quickly got picked up by ECS because the Facilities Division up in Mid Atlantic was looking to expand their code compliance capabilities, and my resume seemed to have a lot of the pieces and parts they wanted to put into the system.

Rick Hinson:

I came aboard in 2018 after having been a building official, a code compliance guy, and a private engineer in my background, so I brought all that to with me when I came into ECS. I was asked to run and enhance the Code Compliance Division here with Facilities and that's what I've been doing. That's sort of a thumbnail sketch of about 40 years of experience.

Steve Gosselin:

You used the word and referenced code many times, to the folks that are listening, just not everybody knows either what codes are, or in your case, what kind of codes were important or what you focused

on. So just tell us a little bit more about code, code compliance, and some of the things you did, and then what you brought to ECS and the value in what you're doing.

Rick Hinson:

That's a good point, and I'm glad you said it that way because a lot of people don't really get this world. When I say codes, I'm talking about building codes. If I break it down to the layman's terms, if I go build a deck on my house, I have to go get a building permit. I'll break it down to the very simplest thing that you might run into. If you build a deck, you might have to get a building permit. Well, certainly if you build a house, we have to get a building permit, taking that theory on up. If you build an apartment complex, or if you build a theater, or anything that you build now requires a building permit. And that really hasn't always been true, it really has only been true in this century, more or less, that most of this has come to be.

Rick Hinson:

And so when I talk code, I'm talking building codes, and trade codes, I'm talking about mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and fire. And those are the codes that, when I work, I'm dealing with, is the building codes that lead to a permit, are involved with a permit, or as we'll talk about I think in a few minutes, the inspections that come from those permits. Because it's not that you just get a piece of paper, it's now, it's a whole process. It's a very iterative process to get to what's called a certificate of occupancy.

Rick Hinson:

That's my world. When I say codes, that's my world. And where I come from is having been a plan examiner, a field inspector, and a building official. So I was the guy, for instance, at Virginia Tech, that if you wanted a building permit, if you wanted to do something like build a building, you came to our office, and I was the building official, and I was the guy that signed all those documents and papers that said you could build it, and here's the code under which you're going to build, and here's the inspectors under which we're going to check your work.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. Excellent. Yeah, that's exactly what I was looking for. And I used a code word, no pun intended there, saying that our listeners want to understand, honestly, that was me. I know a very little bit about code, code compliance, and things like that, so that was really my question.

Rick Hinson:

Well, I'll tell you, it's a great question because this is... You and I both know, you go to school four years, you never have a class on the codes.

Steve Gosselin:

That's right.

Rick Hinson:

You don't. You may take a class on steel and learn about the steel standards, and you may take a class on concrete and learn about the concrete standards, but you never learn codes. And architects are the same way. Since I went to Virginia Tech, we have an Architecture School there, they don't have classes on code, building codes. It gets sort of thrown in, almost peripheral. So that's a good question, we don't

really teach it, and anybody that learns codes, literally, it's an OJT experience, it's an on the job training experience, which is kind of a sad thing, but it's true. That was a great question.

Steve Gosselin:

Before we move on, being an historian, and a lover and studier of history, is there a history of codes? Is there like a first building code? And then, I know you can embellish how some of the codes came about, and some of them came about really because of disasters, or problems, or building collapses, or fires or things like that. So, is there a history of codes?

Rick Hinson:

Oh yeah, there definitely is. When we teach, it's called core in Virginia, code core, you actually learn that there are codes that go back to Hammurabi, and that you're going all the way back in Middle Eastern, thousands of years, where if you built the building wrong and it fell down, you may have to pay, if you're a contractor, you may have to pay with your life for a building failure. We don't quite do that nowadays, that would be a little brutal. But yeah, there is a history. In this country, if I bring it home, in this country, we did not have a lot of building codes until you get into the middle of the 20th century.

Rick Hinson:

Now there's some cities, like for instance, I said I grew up in Williamsburg, Williamsburg had a code of sorts, and it came from the fact that people began to realize as you build wood buildings, they burn, right? And so there becomes some rules, if you're going to live in a city, and you're going to have wood building next to wood building next to wood building next to wood building, they began writing some rules about where you put kitchens, for instance, and where you could put things that burn, but they weren't really hardwired codes as we think of them now.

Rick Hinson:

But as time went on, and if you think back, if you take history or you remember history, you might remember the big fires that we had between the 1860s and 1900s, you had a lot of fires, probably the most famous is the Chicago fire. But that is just because it's famous, there were fires all over the country. The problem was wood construction, densely built wood construction, because quite frankly, if my barn burned down, nobody would know about it or care except my wife and I, but in the cities, a lot of people get impacted very quickly.

Rick Hinson:

And so what was happening was insurance companies were getting nailed because of fire claims. And they said, "We have got to do something about this." And so, largely driven in many ways by the insurance world, then more and more rules began to come in, largely in the cities, because of fires. And there, if you look back through history, almost every major city has had a major fire somewhere along the line. You also see the growth of the fire suppression business, people trying to put fires out earlier. And so, all of this comes forth as we come in past World War II, you begin to get all, the whole process of creating codes, adopting codes, and enforcing codes, around that whole period.

Rick Hinson:

In Virginia, we did not adopt a uniform statewide code until 1974, 75. So prior to then, you might live out in the country like I do and not have any code to worry about at all. Or you would go to Roanoke and

have the Roanoke code. Well after 75, the entire Commonwealth of Virginia, regardless of where you live, has a code, a set of building codes. But it's all largely been driven by fire and by failure.

Rick Hinson:

If you think about, you're exactly right, I always said that the code is built on people's lives. Every three years, we make an update to the code, and the process is looking at what damages and what things have happened over the years. There were changes, if you think about the big event in New York, when the planes hit, there were a number of changes in the code as people began to forensically figure out what happened, and what can be done to make buildings more safe, even though we don't run into airplanes every day. But there were some sections of code that got thrown in to deal with fire and communications.

Rick Hinson:

So, again, that's kind of a thumbnail sketch, but there is a history, and it has a lot to do with lives and people being hurt, and that's what's driving the code. The other thing I think that's driving the code right now, wherever you may come out on this question, I'm not going to get into, but there's a lot of talk about energy and all that, and that's beginning to creep into the codes as well, about energy management and that sort of thing. But largely it has mostly to do with fire, fire and people's lives.

Steve Gosselin:

Okay, excellent. Yeah, I know a lot more about codes and the history, and how it's evolved over centuries than I knew before, for sure. So, we'll transition a little bit, your area of expertise, and I guess one of the main things you and your team do here at ECS, is internally what we call TPIP, but I know it stands for Third Party Inspections, things like that. So, tell us a little bit, what is TPIP, and why is TPIP important?

Rick Hinson:

Sure. Be glad to. Let me get a running start into what we call T-PIP. I'm a NASA brat, so we turn all these letters into words. NASA is N-A-S-A, right?

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah.

Rick Hinson:

So T-PIP, T-P-I-P, is T-PIP.

Steve Gosselin:

Okay, there you go.

Rick Hinson:

We actually have focused on three different worlds just to get there. One is code consulting, so there's a lot of folks, a lot of architects and engineers, remember I said, they don't take it in school. There's a lot of architects and engineers that will just call us and say, "Hey, what do I do about...", fill in the blank. So that's code consulting, and we actually enjoy doing that. We like being ahead of the problem and helping people solve problems. So that's code consulting.

Rick Hinson:

The other is plan review, so if you go get a permit, somebody has to look at your plans before you get the permit. And so we do third party plan review, but once the permit is issued, and again, I'm going to go back to the deck. You've built a deck on the back of your yard, and so what happens next? You have your permit, your contractor is there, what happens next? He digs a hole, he's going to place concrete in the hole, and he's going to put a post on it. Well, before the concrete gets placed, somebody will probably come and look at the hole. And when you get the concrete placed and then you put the post on it and you start building the framing, somebody's going to come and look at the framing. Are you using the right framing? Are you using the right connections? So on and so forth. That's inspections, there's an inspection process.

Rick Hinson:

And T-PIP is Third Party Inspection Program. So what happens is, ECS, our team, can provide those field inspections for the contractor or for the jurisdiction, so that as this product is coming out of the ground, whatever it may be, when it gets framed up and we start adding mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire systems, that as this building becomes a building, that we're actually there looking at it during the process. And it's an iteration, you look at it a little bit at a time, so that by the time you get to the end of the project, the building official can be reasonably confident that it's in compliance with the approved drawings and the appropriate codes. So that's what T-PIP is, it's field inspections as it comes up.

Rick Hinson:

And I can tell, we're going to talk in a few minutes about some of the other inspections because people probably, if you're familiar with what goes on, you're now thinking, "Hmm, that sounds like special inspections." Don't go there. We'll get you there, but don't go there yet. So T-PIP is literally third party inspections. The important piece to this, remember though, is this is normally inspections that are done by the building official, but in this case, the building official, for some reason, which I'll talk about, can't get there, is busy, whatever, and so ECS is now going to stand in the place of the building official staff and take care of that for them, which is why it's called third party, because we're a third party doing what the building official normally does.

Steve Gosselin:

Okay. I think you just answered my question, because I know, back in the day, any construction, whether it's a major project or an expansion on the house, or like you said, a deck, and you always had to wait for the building code official to come out, and sometimes you might be held up a day or two, or even longer. So what we do, or what you and your team does, is you actually take the place of this person. So the connection to the jurisdiction, is there some sort of contract? Or in your case, a professional engineer, have to be involved? How do we get the authority to stand in for the jurisdiction in that person?

Rick Hinson:

That's a good question, and it's incredibly jurisdictional. I am a PE, I'm a PE in Virginia and a couple of other places, but it's very jurisdictional. As a matter of fact, I had a conversation just this morning with a building official because we're looking at a project in his jurisdiction. We end up working for two masters most of the time. And by that I mean, our staff will work under the authority of the building official, in other words, permission. But quite often, the bill or the invoice is being paid by the owner or perhaps

the contractor. So we literally work for two different masters at one time. I cannot do this work, we cannot do this work, without the authority of the building official.

Rick Hinson:

This work is specifically listed in the administrative section of the code and it's reserved work for the building official. So in order to do it, I have to be authorized by that person. There's nothing in the code that gives it to us, there's nothing in the code that makes it third party. There is in the code, it's theirs. So if I'm going to do it, I have to have their permission or their authority. And if they can give me permission, they can just as quickly take that permission away. Very, very conscious of that. And so we're always being very conscious to be in their head, to know what they're for. And each jurisdiction can be very different, and as a matter of fact they are, each jurisdiction is very different from another. I respect that, they're, each one, individual building officials, and so, there you are.

Rick Hinson:

But we can work for the jurisdiction, in a couple places in Virginia, we do. But most often we work for either the developer, sometimes we'll work for the contractor, but typically it's the developer or the owner, or the jurisdiction. If you work for the contractor, it gets a little funky because a lot of jurisdictions will think that's a conflict of interest. I will work for whoever I'm allowed to work for, and our reports always go to the building official. I'm very transparent with them because they can fire me at the drop of a hat. They can remove me from the job, actually, they can't fire me because they don't have a contract with me, but they can remove me from the job, because they're the ones that authorized me to be there to start with. I apologize, I have long answers for short questions.

Steve Gosselin:

No, no, no. This is great. No, this is, like I said before we got started, we're just having a conversation today, and I'm about to turn it over to Julie. I mean, we both have a lot of curiosity about the folks in our company, about what we do, the services we provide, who we work for, what we do. We hear a lot about this stuff, and so having these conversations with our team members, really, it answers a lot of questions for us. We gain a lot of knowledge, and then we provide this content, and we have several hundred listeners now that, every two weeks, they listen to the podcast, and so they get enlightened, what we do as a company. So, this is a great conversation.

Rick Hinson:

Good.

Steve Gosselin:

So you have clearly laid a great foundation right now for code, code compliance, what they are, why they're important, third party inspection, why that's important. So, Julie, you take it from here, I know you've got some questions as well, too. So I'll let you ask a few of your inquisitive questions.

Julie Smith:

Yes. Like Steve earlier, we're saying, oh, we're asking this for our listeners, or we're asking for a friend, but really, it's Steve and I want to know, we just happen to be recording this. So, you mentioned earlier about T-PIP and special inspections, so I think now's the time that we want to dive in. How is it different? Tell me.

Rick Hinson:

That's great. And I'll tell you, I could do this all morning, so you'll have to pull me back. So special inspections is so unique, if you look at special inspections, it's a separate chapter in the building code, we also call it chapter 17. And it comes from another place, we talked about where does T-PIP come from, where does the codes come from? Well, special inspections has a birth process, too. If you go backwards in time, you will find that there is a poster child, if you will, for special inspections. It was the Hyatt, Kansas City Hyatt, there was a major failure in the construction and the process of construction, and it was kind of the last straw. There had been a number of failures nationwide in construction, and you're talking about the period of time after World War II, where buildings are bigger and bigger, the methods of construction are changing, there's a lot of things being done to really get some large structures and fancier structures.

Rick Hinson:

The Hyatt was a good example. They had a promenade with a tea room, with some decks, and the engineer had designed a deck system that was supported from the roof, and the contractor did not want to build it the way it was designed. He made field changes, the result of the field changes and the failure to keep all these pieces and parts in the right place, to make it very short, I have actually have a whole presentation on this as well. But anyway, the bottom line was, the decks fell, and I think over 200 people were killed or injured. And at that point, there was actually a congressional committee that was formed to take a look at what's going on in construction and to find a solution.

Rick Hinson:

And from that grew what we now know as special inspections. And it was specifically in design, to get engineers more involved with the projects they designed in the field. And so a series of various inspections was promulgated, was inserted into all of the codes at the time. At that time, there were four codes, there's now just two. But, program was inserted into the codes, and now you have the requirement for a third party, engineering third parties to go out and to do inspections, over and above what the jurisdiction would do, because the average jurisdiction doesn't have engineers. The average town, city, and county doesn't have engineers on staff to look at this.

Rick Hinson:

And so you have special inspections, and what happened, of course, is firms like ECS became very involved in special inspections. They largely have to do with structural items, although over years there have been some other things that have crept in, some mechanical issues have crept into this program, but that's what special inspections is.

Rick Hinson:

So most of our local offices, if in fact not all of them, are very involved in special inspections which derives right out of chapter 17. It is designed as a third party program, right from the code going forward, and you think about the process, the services in special inspections, you're going to find weld inspections, you're going to find concrete observation and inspection, replacement office, you find your rebar inspections in there, all of those things that are concrete related, steel structural related, a lot of your materials testing comes out of that, mortar and concrete. So that's all special inspections, but I want to emphasize, that's all chapter 17 of the building code and it's designed, right from the beginning, to be a third party inspection process. That's not the same as the mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and

building inspections that are found in T-PIP, which are designed to be the code officials work that we're providing as a third party. Does that make sense?

Julie Smith:

Yeah, I think so.

Rick Hinson:

I think so? Ooh, that's a little scary.

Steve Gosselin:

That's a Julie-ism there. That's all.

Rick Hinson:

Oh, okay, good.

Julie Smith:

That's fine. [inaudible 00:31:30].

Rick Hinson:

Because this is something, I had this conversation as a matter of fact, this morning with one of the building officials, and I'm a special inspections purist, and that is nothing should be in a jurisdiction special inspection program, in my mind, except what is in the building code chapter 17. I do know of a couple of jurisdictions that have taken things that are not special inspections, and they've thrown them into the bucket because it's just an easy place for them to put them. I don't argue with them, I simply, in the back of my head say, that's not where you should do that. But I'm a special inspections purist in that regard. That's why I wanted to make sure I explained it well.

Steve Gosselin:

You did. You nailed it.

Julie Smith:

Talking about T-PIP, the difference between that and special inspections, where does T-PIP fall in the phase of a project or within the life cycle? We've been talking a lot about the life cycle of our projects and where our services fall. So where does T-PIP fall into the mix?

Rick Hinson:

Again, good question, and it falls pretty close to the beginning. In our heads, let's just build a, I don't know, let's just build a two or three story building that has a fire suppression system and a slab for a minute. So, as you come up with that building, the first things, of course, you put in the ground are footings and foundations. But what you have to get in there are going to be underground piping, like your domestic water line, your fire water line, there's something called a Ufer, it's a connection to the reinforcing steel for electrical ground bonding. So those are T-PIP items. Now, the footing, the actual reinforcing steel in the footing, the placing of concrete, and the concrete, that can all be done by special inspections. But all those underground utility things, those are T-PIP, so we get involved pretty early,

and then we get kind of quiet for a while, because what happens, we take care of that and then the special inspections guys tend to pick up on the slabs, and all the placing of the concrete and all that.

Rick Hinson:

And then they start framing. And then once you start framing, then we're back, because we're going to do building inspections on framing. We're going to do mechanical, electrical, and plumbing, and fire system rough ins, so we're going to look at the wiring, we're going to look at the piping, we're going to look at the mechanical duct work, for instance, until it all gets closed in. And of course the framing itself, does the framing match what's in the drawings, and that sort of thing. As they build, do they destroy the framing? And I see that all the time, the framer will do a great job putting up the framing, and then in comes the mechanical [inaudible 00:34:25] applying contractor, and well by golly, that piece of wood is in the way. Bam, now it's not in the way. And so, we're there through that process until they finally close it in.

Rick Hinson:

And close it in means that you now have the exterior wall and the interior gypsum so you can't see what's inside the wall anymore. That's closing it in. And so, we'll do that, up to the close in, we'll be taking a look at what goes in and we let them close it, insulation goes in. And then finally at the end, we'll do pick up on the finals, does the electrical system work like it's supposed to? Have they put in the mechanical devices and the plumbing devices the way they were supposed to have? Those are finals.

Rick Hinson:

Now once we're through with the finals, our reports will demonstrate this as we go along, but then the building official will know that, yes, they've done the rough in, they've done the undergrounds, they've done the rough ins, they've done the finals, I can issue a certificate of occupancy on that project. We literally live on the project from the undergrounds all the way until just before the CO is issued.

Julie Smith:

So we've had Keith Nelson speak about building envelope, and right at the end there, you're talking about when the building is enclosed. Can you talk a little bit about the difference between building envelope and T-PIP? And what that line is?

Rick Hinson:

Yeah, so building envelope is outside the building code. Now they have standards, they're not wild west, free cycling their way through this. But the building code really doesn't drive the envelope per se. There are some energy crossovers, but, for instance, if you think about, I'll just pick an easy one, because we had this conversation last week. If you think about, let's say an underground parking garage, I just picked something randomly that's easy to think about. Think about an underground parking garage, and so you have, typically, cast in place concrete walls. Well, water will come through those walls. I mean, after a while, you will begin to get water through. And so you will want to put waterproofing on the outside of those walls, and you'll want to make sure that wall, and that wall system, is waterproof. Okay, well that's an envelope issue, right?

Rick Hinson:

So the code will say, you need to waterproof the wall. But there's not really, other than an inspection, which is a visual inspection for that, at the most we may come up and go, "Yeah, we see your

waterproofing system, and your waterproofing system is right here on this design drawing. What I see matches this, that's on the drawing. I'm good to go." Well, Keith takes that one step farther. Keith tests it. Ah, yes, so we're now testing the waterproofing. So he's taking that building envelope one step farther than just the code is.

Rick Hinson:

So it's important to remember the code is the minimum. The code official, it's the maximum the building official can enforce, but it's the very minimum you have to do for a building. And so, the building envelope guys take this whole concept of doing a good job beyond what the code requires. And I told my brother this when he was having a house built, and he was very proud of the contractor who said, and my brother would kill me if he knew I said this.

Rick Hinson:

Anyway, he said, the contractor said, he's going to build it right to the code, and he was very proud of that statement. And I said, "That's wonderful. That means the building official has just told you he will do the absolute minimum he has to do to get the certificate of occupancy." And my brother was [inaudible 00:38:25], because he goes, "You mean that doesn't mean he'll do the best job?" I said, "No, that means he'll do the minimum he needs to do to get done." He really, for what you're paying-

Julie Smith:

[inaudible 00:38:36] survive.

Rick Hinson:

You really want to make him do more than the code. The code is the minimum, the code is the minimum for life and fire safety, it's not the maximum. Keith's team takes that whole code enforcement and goes beyond it, and you get a better building than just [inaudible 00:38:55].

Julie Smith:

Right. Right. It's like surviving to thriving, is what I'm picturing in my head.

Rick Hinson:

That's not a bad, yeah.

Julie Smith:

To survive, make sure it stays up, but we want our buildings to thrive. Yeah, yeah. Say we have an employee listening who thinks maybe one of our clients will need some of these T-PIP services. How should our team member approach the client? What questions should they be asking our clients? How can we better sell these services to our clients?

Rick Hinson:

Yeah, let's sort of delve into, why would a jurisdiction even do this? I mean, and that'll help answer what our staff can ask. I mean, why would a client even want to do this? Because theoretically, the jurisdiction does all this work, right? Well, what's driving this is that it's becoming very difficult for jurisdictions to find staff to do this work. As I said this morning, I just got off the phone, and the gentleman I was talking to, he doesn't have the staff, there's a bunch of very large projects coming into his jurisdiction, very

large commercial projects, and he does not have the staff. And it is taking a lot of time, and it's difficult to find people to do this work. There's a host of reasons behind it I won't get into, but every building official I talk to has the exact same problem, and that is a staffing problem. Whether it's plan review or field inspection, it is ubiquitous throughout all of our regions.

Rick Hinson:

And so you have jurisdictions, and I won't say which one, but I know of jurisdictions that it takes weeks, once you call in for an inspection, it takes weeks to get an inspection. Now, if you think, since a lot of our folks are familiar with projects, imagine for instance that somebody dug a trench and put steel in it, and had to wait three weeks before the inspector could come out and look at it before they could put concrete in the trench. In three weeks, you could have a half a dozen rainstorms, you'd be digging more mud out than you want to think about, your steel is going to rust. You need to have that inspection pretty much that day or the next day to keep moving, not to mention what happens to your schedule. If you have to wait a week, and you have to hold your trades and not do anything, or send them, you have to creatively assign them so that you can wait a week or more for an inspection, then that's going to make your building really take a long time, very complex.

Rick Hinson:

But that's what's happening. A lot of jurisdictions, I know one that at one point was three weeks out. That's incredible. What happens is, we fill that gap. We get there that next day, because we've got staff to do it. We've got the staff they don't have. And like I said, I'm not going to get into why that is, and it's not terribly easy for us, but it's a little easier for us to hire than for jurisdictions. But, that's where we start filling the niche.

Rick Hinson:

So what you want to ask your clients is, how's the timing working on your projects? Are you getting your inspections within 48 hours? Are your projects moving? When you're building something in any town USA, pick your jurisdiction, are you actually getting that service on a reasonable time? And if they say, "It's taking a long time to get inspectors out here," that's where you take the next question, and it's like, "Really? Well, we've got people that can handle that. Can we talk to the building official? Have you talked to the building official? Would they allow a third party?" And begin to have that conversation about what goes on.

Rick Hinson:

Now there are some jurisdictions that are very well staffed and they will say, "No, we don't do third party." But if you go over that imaginary line into the very next jurisdiction, the question will be answered differently. And you have to look at it from a jurisdiction to jurisdiction, a county to city to town, because it's not a regional thing. It's literally county, city, town decision, and it can be different on that imaginary line that you only see on the map. But that's the sort of thing you start asking about, what is the time that it's taking for you to get inspections? And if they say it's over a week, and you say, hey, we can do that. It's a good chance they'll jump on that like a June bug, for the simple fact that time is always money, and that's what's driving the whole thing.

Rick Hinson:

We do these in DC all the time, we're one of the larger providers of it in the DC market. Montgomery County, Maryland, and Prince Georges County, Maryland, we're a pretty significant provider of this

service up there. Richmond, Charlottesville, where it looks like we're working on one in Danville, so it's all over the State of Virginia, but you've got to ask. It's not an auto, you've got to ask. And each one of them has their own program so you have to get their policy and things like that. But that's what you ask, what's the timeframe that you're running into? And how can we help you? That's the big question to ask.

Julie Smith:

Gotcha. Awesome. All right, Rick, what am I missing? I feel like we ran through a long list of questions, but I'm sure there's one or two bullet points that we haven't quite touched on that you want to speak to.

Rick Hinson:

Yeah, I'll hit two items. This has been coming on quite a bit this year, interestingly enough, so we have a lot of jurisdictions. We have a number of jurisdictions and a lot of clients that have been asking us to come out and do quality assurance, framing for instance. The jurisdiction may not have a third party program, but the contractor in these situations wants to make sure that their framing will pass the first time, or pass with a minimum of problem. So we have a number of contracts where we're coming out and doing a QA inspection, telling the contractor, "This is not going to work. That's going to fail. You need to fix this." Yada yada yada. And that gives them a chance to tweak what they've got before they actually get a code inspection by the city or town or county, but now they're moving their ball faster. They're not getting inspection failures, they're getting more inspection passes, which keeps their schedule on track.

Rick Hinson:

There again, if you have a client that's having a very difficult time with framing, if you're in a conversation with a client and he's talking about problems with framing inspections from the jurisdiction, then there's a place to ask, "Hey, we can come by and do QA inspections for you. We can pre-find those things so that your jurisdictional inspections go faster." We're doing that in a number of places. And again, it's a matter of moving the project along because time is always money.

Rick Hinson:

The other one that we've been seeing a lot of is smoke control testing. So this is a test at observation, it's a very complex process, it requires integration of the fire alarms, the mechanical system, just a whole number of things. But it's a line item in the statement of special inspections, of all places. We've had a number of calls from some local offices that said, "Hey, smoke control is checked off in our statement of special inspections, but we don't have any mechanical capabilities. What are we doing with smoke control?" Well, we can take care of that. We have staff and personnel that we can actually take care of doing smoke control systems testing and observations that is found in the statement of special inspections.

Rick Hinson:

And this typically happens if you have a very tall building with pressurized stairs, or if you have a tall atrium, things like that, those kick on a smoke control system. Because if you have a fire, you've got to get smoke out quickly so people can exit the building. For whatever reason, that is one of those non-structural items that's in the statement of special inspections in chapter 17, but most local offices don't have the mechanical tools or background to deal with it, and we can take care of that. And we've done a

number in Northern Virginia now, just this year alone. Those are the two big ones that are really turning our pages nowadays.

Julie Smith:

Gotcha. All right, Steve, I'll hand it over, back to you.

Steve Gosselin:

Let's start wrapping this up, and this has really been an excellent conversation, very informative. We'd like to ask a final question. What fills your cup? What makes you happy or brings you joy?

Rick Hinson:

A quiet weekend on my farm. So I drive, from my office, it takes me about a half hour to get home. In the sense of all transparency, I'm in my sixties, so, I've done a lot of things in my life, I filled my cup with a lot of things over my years. I've been on the stage, I've been on the theater. I get a chance, I make presentations to people. I get to teach. I enjoy everything, and I've had an enormous blessing in my life that has filled my cup. And now, I look back on a lot of those things and I enjoy them, but really, I get home, I get out of my truck and I look over, if you could see my team's background.

Rick Hinson:

I have the blessing of living on a mountaintop, and what makes me happy or brings me joy is when I can, I have a fireplace in the yard, and I can sit there with a beverage and watch the sun go down on a warm evening and sit. My wife and I can just watch the birds and the horses, and watch the sun go down, and quite frankly, that makes me happy and that brings me joy.

Steve Gosselin:

Yeah. Well, I can hear it in your voice, and you exude gratitude, and I know that you're grateful for all the many blessings that you've been given.

Rick Hinson:

I am indeed.

Steve Gosselin:

Been bestowed upon you. No doubt about it. So, that's great.

Rick Hinson:

Yep.

Steve Gosselin:

Well, listen, we want to thank you very much, not only was this informative and enlightening, but we could just hear the passion in you about what it is you do.

Rick Hinson:

Thank you.

Steve Gosselin:

And how good you are at it and everything, and so I know that'll translate over to our listeners as well, too. But thanks for your time, I know how busy you are and how much construction's going on, especially in the State of Virginia and all the jurisdictions, and the help you all are providing. So, thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule. Thanks for spending time with us. Thanks for teaching us more about special inspections, T-PIP, codes, code compliance. This has been a great conversation. Thank you very much.

Rick Hinson:

It has been my pleasure this morning.

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Outro

Steve Gosselin:

Thank you for listening to Coffee Talk: From The Ground Up. We hope you enjoyed today's episode. If you have an idea on future topics, guests, or are up for round of golf, you can call me, text me, email me, just get in touch with me, and I'll get it to Julie and we'll get it set up.

Julie Smith:

And for those of you that don't want to play golf, and you may hate talking on the phone, that's okay, you can send us an email at ecsmarketing@ecslimited.com. Be sure to follow us on social media and subscribe to this podcast so you never miss an episode.

Steve Gosselin:

Thanks, Julie. Here's to having a great day.