

D1.1: How Often Is Too Often?

How frequently should a code like D1.1, *Structural Welding Code — Steel*, be updated?

The question is simple, and over the past few years, the D1 Structural Welding Committee has asked it many times. Many issues, however, should be considered when developing an answer. During a recent discussion, a previous statement from long-time committee member William A. Milek Jr. was recalled and quoted: “The value of a standard is reflected by its longevity.”

To some of us, there is wisdom in those words.

The American Welding Society published the first edition of the *Code for Fusion Welding and Gas Cutting in Building Construction* in 1928. The first bridge welding specification was published separately in 1936. AWS D1.1 was first issued in 1972 and covered both buildings and bridges. This practice continued until 1988 with the issuance of the AASHTO/AWS joint publication D1.5, whereupon welding requirements for bridge and building applications were once again separated.

In the 41-year period from the printing of the first building welding code in 1928 until the last building-only code in 1969, nine editions were issued with an average time between them of five years. In the earliest years of D1.1, it was published every three years with annual interim revisions. In the late 1970s, the interim revisions gave way to annual publication. Since 1986, D1.1 has been issued every two years.

After 24 years of this every other year tradition, it is fair to ask, “Why change?” After all, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” However, in the minds of some of us on the D1 Committee, the publication cycle was “broke” and needed fixing. Consider the following:

- Some D1.1 purchasers have said the issue-to-issue changes are minor and not enough to justify a new edition
- Fabricators with multiple projects in their shops at the same time often find each project governed by a different edition of D1.1, adding unnecessary confusion to welding operations
- Engineers and designers cite the number of construction standards (not just welding codes) and the frequency of revisions as major factors adding complexity to their jobs.

Donald Rager, my predecessor as D1 chair, decided to challenge the status quo of the past two decades. With the support of the D1 Executive Subcommittee, a variety of presentations were made, eventually resulting in the topic being discussed by the AWS board of directors. The board commissioned an independent study — with a focus on publication frequency — to obtain the opinions of D1 purchasers.

Key findings of the study included the following:

- Fewer than one-third of the respondents (30%) recommended that D1.1 be revised on a two-year or more frequent cycle.
- More than two-thirds of the respondents indicated that D1.1 represents a fair to excellent value based on its purchase price. The study offered the opportunity for verbatim comments to be submitted. Some notso-bashful D1 purchasers were quite outspoken. Following are representative comments:
- “Stop making ridiculous changes in order to sell more code books.”
- “Code revisions are too frequent. Once every four or five years is sufficient. It is perceived as forced to increase income.”

Rather than rejecting these types of comments as simply the voice of malcontents, the AWS board welcomed the feedback, and put the issue back into the D1 Committee’s hands, requesting that it review the study’s findings and recommend a plan. A plan was developed and eventually adopted by both the D1 Committee and the AWS board of directors.

Starting with the 2010 edition, D1.1, *Structural Welding Code — Steel*, will be published on a five-year cycle. This frequency is consistent with that of the American Institute of Steel Construction steel specifications and the American National Standards Institute requirement that standards be reaffirmed or revised on a five-year cycle.

D1.1 users are expected to experience multiple benefits from this change, but to me, what is most important is what it represents: AWS and its leadership are committed to being responsive and to make the changes necessary to better serve the needs of our industry.

So, when you get your copy of D1.1:2010, take care of it. You’ll need it for the next five years.



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