

# In Memoriam: Jaime Moncada-Perez Advancing Fire Protection in Latin America

**J**aime Moncada-Pérez passed away on August 31, 2020 in Bogotá, Colombia from complications following a cerebral ischemia, at almost 89 years of age. Don Jaime, as he was usually known, is recognized for introducing NFPA and modern fire protection to Latin America, an effort he began more than 40 years ago.

## His background

Mr. Moncada was born in 1931 in the coffee region of Colombia. His father's business was gold mining, and he often told the story of how, when he was very young, a lightning strike started a fire that practically destroyed his father's mine, leaving him almost bankrupt. Years later, another fire burned down the house where he lived with his parents and siblings, and destroyed almost half a block, including the town's City Hall. Don Jaime said that these two incidents aroused in him, from a young age, an interest in fire protection.

In the absence of good schools where he lived, his parents sent him to boarding school in Manizales, the nearest city, where he graduated from high school in 1949. He then studied Chemical Engineering at the University of Antioquia in Medellín, graduating in 1955, then achieved a master's degree in

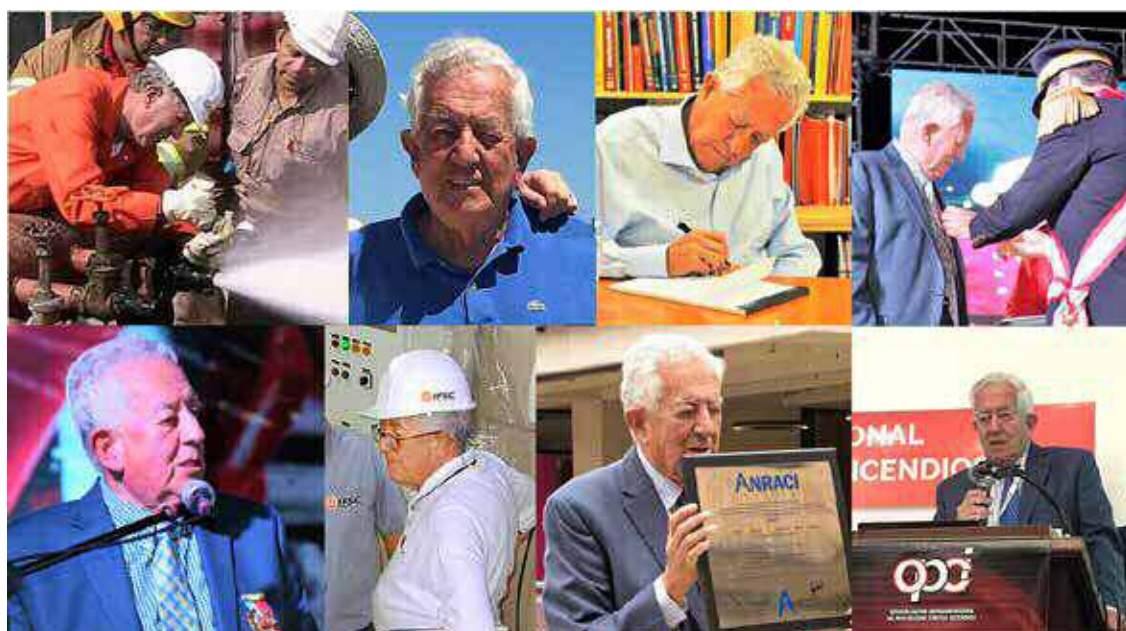
Industrial Hygiene at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, graduating in 1957, and completed his graduate studies with a master's degree in Economics at the Andes University in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1970. For much of his professional career he taught evening and Saturday morning courses at the National University of Colombia, including the first Life Safety courses to be taught in Colombia. He always had a special affinity for studying and teaching.

## His professional career

One of Mr. Moncada's first jobs was as head of industrial safety for Colombia's main brewery, Bavaria, where he was responsible, among other things, for fire protection of the different bottling plants owned by the company. In 1972, he left that job and started a company called Micrón, which produced extinguishing dry chemical powders and firefighting additives. He then founded Pirotec, which manufactured portable extinguishers and fire hose cabinets, and shortly after began installing fire protection systems, including automatic sprinklers. At the end of the 1970s he founded Pirocontrol, perhaps the first fire protection engineering firm in Latin America. He managed these companies throughout his professional life.

## The start of his relationship with NFPA

As director of his fire protection companies, Mr. Moncada realized that there were no fire protection standards in Spanish for the training of his employees. He decided to visit NFPA in Boston in 1976 and proposed that they become interested in Latin America. In 1978, he was visited in Bogotá by Robert Grant, then president of NFPA, and as a result it was decided to organize the first fire protection congress in Latin America, which was a resounding success. From that point, he started a relationship with Chief David Gratz, NFPA's first international director, which would result not only in a deep friendship, but also in generating an important public objective: the dissemination of fire safety best practices to the Spanish-speaking world. Both Messrs. Gratz and Moncada decided that to carry out this goal, an institution based in Latin America needed to be developed, and in 1981, OLAPCI was founded, the predecessor of the Ibero-American Fire Protection Organization (OPCI), a not-for-profit association over which Mr. Moncada presided with distinction until the day of his death.



◀ Jaime Moncada-Perez enjoyed a full and active career and was a familiar face within the industry.



▲ Showing NFPA standards during the First Centenary Commemoration of the Uruguayan Fire Service in Montevideo in 1987.



▲ Mr. Moncada receiving a lifetime award from Jim Shannon, President of NFPA, during OPCI's 30th anniversary in Bogota.

### NFPA growth in LATAM

The relationship of Mr. Moncada with NFPA created the foundation for what fire protection is today in Spanish-speaking countries. Under his leadership, the first NFPA standards were translated into Spanish and seminars and congresses were launched throughout Latin America. He also became the first NFPA seminar instructor in Spanish, and during his career he taught hundreds of seminars throughout the Spanish speaking world. He established a fire protection certificate program that has been taught uninterrupted for the last thirty years. In 1981 he started a fire protection magazine, which in 1998 became the NFPA Journal Latinoamericano. In 2002 he was one of the first to be certified as a Fire Protection Specialist by NFPA, known as CEPI in Spanish-speaking countries.

Mr. Moncada maintained warm working relationships with each of NFPA's international directors who succeeded Chief Gratz – Nick Candee and Olga Caledonia. He met the last five presidents of NFPA: Charlie Morgan, Bob Grant, George Miller, Jim Shannon, and James Pauly. Mr. Shannon became a great friend and his best ally, and when the two of them worked together, it was the turning point of NFPA in Latin America. From Mr. Moncada's introduction of those previously unknown NFPA codes and standards in the 1970s, to the impressive influence of NFPA throughout Latin America today, his original vision became a reality during his lifetime. Upon fulfillment of Mr. Moncada's two terms



◀ Working with his son Jaime A. Moncada, co-editing NFPA's Fire Protection Handbook in Spanish.

on NFPA's Board of Directors, James Shannon, then president of NFPA wrote: "Jaime has been one of our most powerful advocates and the foundation of our activity across Latin America. I consider Jaime a hero in the history of NFPA for his dedication, professionalism, and commitment to the mission of NFPA."

### Recognitions

During his career, Don Jaime was recognized with many international distinctions: he is the only Latin American to be elected to the Board of Directors of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA); he was co-editor of NFPA's Fire Protection Handbook in Spanish, the only document written for the fire safety practitioner in Latin America; he was awarded the prestigious H.W. Harryatt Award, presented bi-annually by the International Fire Sprinkler Association (IFSA), which is an award only given to people who have made a dramatic contribution to the international advancement of fire protection, and specifically fire sprinklers; he represented Latin America in the Confederation of Fire Protection Associations International; and he received the National Fire Protection

Award in his native country, granted by ANRACI in recognition of his pioneering work on behalf of fire protection in Latin America.

Don Jaime is survived by his second wife Aneth Calderón, managing director of OPCI, his sons who followed his profession, Jaime Andrés, a fire protection engineer and director of International Fire Safety Consulting (IFSC), and Alejandro, an architect specializing in life safety and manager of IFSC Andina, his daughter Maria Claudia, their spouses, and his seven beloved grandchildren to whom he passed on his love for education.

His family, his colleagues, and his many students over the years, celebrate his life full of generosity, of achievements, and of tireless dedication to spreading knowledge in fire protection. We know that his legacy will remain alive in the thousands of professionals who learned from him. He was a teacher's teacher, as well as an irreplaceable father, grandfather, husband, friend, and fire protection professional.

This memoriam was written by Jaime A. Moncada, PE



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