

## **Minnesota Fire Sprinkler Facts and Talking Points version 3.0**

**Prepared by: Pam Perri Weaver**

**Builders Association of Minnesota**

**December, 2008**

- **Builders support safety measures in homes.** Builders supported the requirements in code that added smoke alarms that are hard wired, interconnected and equipped with battery back-ups. Builders also exceeded the IRC code for fire safety by supporting fire sprinklers in all town home units. As a result, Minnesota already exceeds the current code standards for fire safety in residences.
- **The proposed 2009 IRC will require fire sprinklers in new construction only. Why?** If residential fires are such a safety hazard, why in only new construction? The addition of sprinklers to new residences only will impact less than 1% of the state's housing stock annually. Therefore, the public policy change will only impact 1% of homeowners. Only 1% of homeowners will be "safe", what about the safety of other 99% of MN homeowners? This code change will not impact even 50% of MN homeowners for at least 60 years.
- **No inspection infrastructure for sprinkler systems.** There is no current inspection infrastructure for the code requirement. While the building code is required statewide. There is no enforcement or inspection requirement. There are only guidelines for inspection. Who will inspect these systems throughout the state to make sure they are operational?
- **Builders will request statutory exemption from warranty obligations should sprinkler system go off and damage a home.** Builders seek to keep excessive moisture and water out of homes. We build homes tight in Minnesota. Drying capacity is limited for wall systems that become wet for any reason. An active sprinkler system bringing that much water into a home will be very costly should the system accidentally go off. Builders will seek exemptions from all warranty obligations to homes for water damage should fire sprinklers be required.
- **Fire officials have cited zero cases of residential fire fatalities in homes built to the 2000 or 2006 IRC standards in Minnesota.** Why? Because the current Minnesota State Building Code requires all new single homes to have smoke alarms that are hardwired, interconnected, and equipped with battery back-ups. Also, the annual *Fire in Minnesota* report does not include the age of the home in their reporting.

- **Fire deaths in Minnesota hit an all time low in 2007.** According to the State Fire Marshall, fire deaths were at an all time low in Minnesota in 2007. Chief Rosenthal states "In the past 30 years annual fire deaths have plunged from 125 to 40 because of several factors that impact each other. ...better detection and suppression methods, better forensic and technologies, public education.
- **Smoke Alarms save lives. A more aggressive fire safety inspection requirement would be less costly and more effective.** Reviewing the Minnesota fire death data as of December 10, 2008 there have been 39 fire deaths for this calendar year. Of those, 30 have been in single family residences or apartments. Of the 30 deaths, 26 may have been prevented had a smoke alarm been present and working. However the data show that in 3 cases no alarm was present, in 1 case the alarm was not working and in 16 cases it is unknown if an alarm was even present and in 6 cases an alarm was present but it is unknown if it was working. This leads us to believe that a more aggressive, fully funded alarm inspection program may be less costly and more effective in preventing fire deaths for all residents. If fire sprinklers are required by the code, new homeowners will spend at least \$60,000,000\*\* purchasing a fire suppression system. The state could make an investment of considerably less to make sure all residences are inspected annually for working detectors. (\*\* 12,000 new homes in Minnesota in 2010, an average of 2,500 square feet per home at \$2.00 per square foot for the fire suppression system.)
- **Smoke alarms work. Consumers feel safe without sprinklers and the demand is not there.** Homeowners aren't voluntarily choosing to install sprinklers; why should the building code require this unwanted and unneeded mandate? The court of public opinion has answered this mandate with a resounding "No!"
- **The cost of mandatory sprinkler provisions will price homeowners out of the safest housing stock ever built in our state.** The average installed cost of a sprinkler system is \$4,800 for a 2,400 square foot home and this is a conservative estimate. These costs soar even higher if a home isn't connected to a community water supply. The National Association of Home Builders estimate that for every \$1,000 the price of a home increases, over 215,000 families are priced out of the market.
- **Fire Sprinkler requirements for homes not on a municipal water source will be excessive.** According to actual bids builders have received for fire sprinkler installations, the code change will cost some homes significantly more. An example from a home quoted in Shorewood is as follows:
  - Bid on a 4,000 square foot home
  - With a 13 d fire sprinkler system (
  - Not on municipal water supply.

Add \$8,000 for a commercial pump (rather than residential pump) to move 35 gallons per minute at 50 psi required by the system.

Add \$7,000 for a large enough pressure tank to hold the water. It will cost more if the well needs to be dug beyond 10 feet from the home.

Add \$8,000 on the fire suppression system itself. (At \$2.00 per square foot for the system)

**Total for Shorewood Home: \$23,000 (with out a generator)**

Add \$8,000 for a generator should the electricity go out.

**Total for Shorewood Home: \$31,000**

- **The addition of fire sprinklers into the 2009 IRC model code was suspect.** The ICC has always had a reputation for fair code process, however, the final action hearings held in Minnesota were tainted by special interests groups. What supplier for the residential construction industry will buy the next code change?
- **The IRC Committee of the International Code Council has consistently voted against mandatory fire sprinklers** for single-family homes at every step of the code process as have a majority of ICC members in all rounds of past code hearings. However in Minneapolis during the final action hearings on the 2009 IRC, the fire suppression industry paid the travel expenses for over 600 attendees who were not part of the regular code proceedings. The ICC must change its rules on who is eligible to vote.
- **The Association of Minnesota Building Officials (AMBO) IRC Committee does not support and never has supported fire sprinkler code mandates for Minnesota homes.** Their 2008 voting guides for the Final Action Hearings confirm this.