



SERVING THE HOME BUILDING AND REMODELING INDUSTRY

Memorandum

December 13, 2010

TO: Department of Labor & Industry Fire Sprinkler Task Force

From: Builders Association of Minnesota
Builders Association of the Twin Cities

RE: Proposed Fire Sprinkler sections in the 2012 IRC

The Builders Association of Minnesota (BAM) and the Builders Association of the Twin Cities (BATC) would like to take this opportunity to thank the Department of Labor and Industry for allowing us to participate in the 2010 Residential Fire Sprinkler Task Force.

As we understand it, the charge of the Task Force was to discuss the proposed fire sprinkler sections for single family residences in the 2012 International Residential Code (IRC) and determine if there are any areas of compromise.

Minnesota amends the IRC model code for building practices, climate and public policy objectives we are looking to achieve in residential construction. The existence of the fire sprinkler mandate in the IRC is of great concern to the residential construction industry and we oppose the mandate. It is our opinion that fire safety data and public policy implications do not support the recommendation of fire sprinklers in 1 – family and 2 - family dwellings.

The Task Force and the Department has provided no substantive information to address the basic public policy question of whether this code recommendation from the International Code Council makes sense for Minnesota. The basic public policy questions are:

- The MN IRC (section R313.1) currently requires all residences, be built with hard wired and interconnected smoke alarms. How does requiring a fire sprinkler system in these new homes increase a homeowner's chance of surviving a fire?

- How does adding a battery operated smoke alarm in each bedroom, each bedroom hallway and on each floor increase a homeowner's chance of surviving a fire in a home without working smoke alarms?
- Do fire deaths decrease when there are working smoke alarms in every single family residence? How about in multifamily or rental residences? What enforcement mechanism is in place to assure that the smoke alarms required by MN Statute 299F.362 are in place and working properly?
- What percentage of fire deaths occurred in Minnesota homes equipped with a hardwired interconnected smoke alarm?
- If working smoke alarms save lives and inspecting to make sure working smoke alarms save lives, what are the statewide requirements to inspect rental properties for fire safety?
- Other states have decided against adopting the fire sprinkler proposal: Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington, West Virginia. Why should Minnesota deviate from this trend? What is significant about Minnesota's fire data compared to other states?
- The fire sprinkler proposal will have a significant cost for homeowners building on land with no public water availability or in rural parts of state with no water infrastructure. How will the cost issue of installing fire sprinklers be addressed for homeowners with wells?
- Has the Department reviewed real bids from builders across the state to determine the actual costs of installation of a fire sprinkler in single family homes in Minnesota? That data should be the basis of a Statement of Need and Reasonableness on the fire sprinkler proposal required through the Minnesota rulemaking process.
- Will the Department be seeking a formal position on the fire sprinkler proposal by the League of MN Cities, the Association of Minnesota Counties and the Association of Minnesota Building Code Officials?
- The recommended fire sprinkler requirements create a public policy outcome where only people who purchase newly constructed homes are worth protecting. At our current rate of construction, it would take over 50 years to protect 50% of Minnesotans living in single family homes. A comprehensive approach to this public safety issue would be all citizens ought to be protected. If fire sprinklers

are worth installing to save a life at any cost, then shouldn't they be required in every new home and existing home at the point of sale to protect all citizens equally?

The Builders were proponents of fire sprinkler requirements in all multi-family construction and also supported the amendments to the IRC that would require hardwired and interconnected smoke detectors in all new construction. We believe the addition of the mandate for fire sprinklers is unreasonable. If a consumer wants to install a fire sprinkler system in their home, builders in Minnesota would be happy to add that component to the home or construction project.

However, we believe homeowners are not compelled to want the added protection for the price. Nor does it appear the price gets the consumer that much more protection for life safety. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reports that occupants of a home have a 99.45 percent chance of surviving in a structure with hard wired interconnected smoke alarms. Adding a fire sprinkler will increase the chance of survival to 99.89 percent.

Data prove that working smoke alarms both hardwired and battery operated save lives. Clearly, inspecting for operational detectors would only increase Minnesota citizen's chance of survival. BAM encourages the Department of Public Safety to spend time recommending statewide requirements for inspections of all properties for working smoke alarms. BAM also recommends statewide code enforcement of inspections which would further ensure that any existing home with an interior remodel would be left with working some alarms.