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Residential Sprinklers

Residential sprinklers are among the many technologies available to homeowners that can dramatically reduce the life-threatening effects of home fires. One day, they will become as common as smoke detectors and home fire extinguishers.

Despite the fact that all major safety codes now call for the installation of fire sprinklers in new one- and two-family homes, sprinkler opponents want to prevent the adoption of these codes at the local level. Despite the proven technology and the life safety record, there are efforts to derail plans for meaningful residential sprinkler legislation. The anti-sprinkler legislation threatens to put lives at stake.

Happily, those efforts have been thwarted.

NFPA is reporting, "A statewide legislative threat that would have eliminated the ability of local communities to adopt or enforce requirements for home fire sprinklers has been defeated in Illinois. The Illinois bill died in recent days, but sprinkler opponents continue to push similar anti-sprinkler legislation in several other states."

To bolster efforts to defeat anti-sprinkler efforts, NFPA is "making available important information regarding the anti-sprinkler bills and the life-saving effect of sprinklers."

According to its Web site, home fire sprinkler advocates can access that information through the Fire Sprinkler Initiative: Bringing Safety Home Web site. This new, free resource is a source of information and contains tools needed to fight for sprinklers in homes. The Fire Sprinkler Initiative, a project of NFPA, is designed to give supporters the resources they need to communicate the need for home fire sprinklers."

Until recently, the concept of installing a home sprinkler system has not received as much attention as it is today. For this, we are grateful. Earlier this fall, International Code Council members debated and voted on code change proposals that included fire sprinklers being required in all new one- and two-family residences beginning Jan. 1, 2011 and fire sprinklers are required in all new townhomes.

Buoyed by the action of the ICC, NFPA recently announced a coordinated campaign to increase the number of homes protected by sprinklers and provided current research on the cost of residential sprinkler installation, which has long been considered a deterrent to installing sprinkler systems.

The effort is designed to advocate for the use of residential sprinklers. According to NFPA research, sprinklers, together with smoke alarms, cut the risk of dying in a home fire 82 percent, relative to having neither.

The research is a national perspective on the cost of installing residential fire sprinklers and is explored a new report *Home Fire Sprinkler Cost Assessment* released the Fire Protection Research Foundation, an NFPA affiliate. According to a press release on the report, the cost of installing sprinkler systems to the homebuilder averaged $1.61 per sprinklered square foot. Sprinklered square feet is the total area of spaces with sprinklers.

The release states "The cost of sprinkler systems to the home builder, in dollars per sprinklered square foot, ranged from $0.38 to $3.66. This cost includes all costs to the builder associated with the system including design, installation, and other costs such as permits; additional equipment, increased tap and water meter fees – to the extent that they apply."

Additional details of the study include case studies that examined installation costs and insurance premium discounts associated with the installation of home fire sprinkler systems were conducted for 10 communities:

Pitt Meadows, BC (Canada);
San Clemente, CA;
Fort Collins, CO;
Huntley, IL;
Matteson, IL;
North Andover, MA;
Carroll County, MD;
Prince George's County, MD;
Wilsonville, OR; and
Pleasant View, TN.

According to the press release on the study, "Communities were selected based on diversity in terms of sprinkler ordinance longevity, geographic location, housing style, and sprinkler system variables such as the type of piping material and the water supply source (municipal or on-site). Three building plans were collected from builders and sprinkler installers within each of these communities, along with sprinkler system cost data and other related cost and system information."

While it will take time for residential sprinklers to gain wide acceptance, the efforts of these two organizations should be commended and recognized as an attempt to reduce the tragedy of home fires.