

Residential Fire Sprinkler Talking Points

Overview

- Changes over the last 30 years in residential construction technology, improved building code requirements – especially for electrical and smoke alarm systems, consumer behavior and concerted efforts by fire fighters, home builders and other safety advocates, resulted in a dramatic drop in the number of fatal home fires. This trend is even more impressive given the significant population growth and increase in housing stock over the same period in our nation.

Fire Deaths Continue To Decline Without A Fire Sprinkler Mandate In New Homes

- Home fires are decreasing as housing stock continues to increase. From 1980 – 2005 home fires in single family attached and detached units decreased by 50 percent as single family units increased by 47 percent.
- Between 1977 and 2007 the number of U.S. fire deaths declined 54 percent even as the population grew by more than 80 million people.

Smoke Alarms Work

- A Johns Hopkins University study, paid for by the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), found 75 percent of residential fire deaths could be prevented by working smoke alarms.
- Smoke detectors have produced the greatest reduction in fire deaths in residential buildings by providing the early warning necessary for occupants to escape fire and deadly smoke. Currently, hardwired smoke detectors are required in all bedrooms, living rooms and the top of stairwells.
- Smoke alarm technology is always improving. Innovations in wireless technology and alternate signal noises continue to boost the already overwhelming success of smoke alarm systems.

New Homes Are Safer Than Ever Before

- Newer homes are safer due to improvements like hardwired smoke detectors, improved electrical systems, better heating systems and insulation requirements, fire separation and firestopping, and escape windows in bedrooms.
- These features protect the home and occupants for the life of the home, unlike older homes that were not constructed with these important design features. New homes do not become more hazardous as they age.
- There is evidence suggesting the age of the structure is linked to fire fatality rates. A study found the average fatality rate in residential dwellings in California consistently increased as the housing stock aged

Reliability Of Residential Fire Sprinklers Is Also Questionable

- A 2009 report by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) found sprinklers did not operate or were not effective in 61 percent of fires occurring in one- and two-family homes. The fire was too small to activate the sprinklers 57 percent of the time, failed to operate 3 percent of the time and operated ineffectively 1 percent of the time.

The same NFPA report says “fatal injury (is) possible even when sprinklers are present and operate.”

An Ounce Of Prevention Is Worth A Pound of Suppression

- Most unintentional fatal residential fires can be prevented if occupants are careful of risky activities such as unattended cooking, candle burning, and smoking. Additionally, changes in smoking habits, fire-safe cigarettes and ignition resistant furnishings help reduce the risk. As with smoke alarms, fire prevention education is a more practical, effective and proven approach to reducing home fire incidents than mandates for home fire sprinklers.

Fire Sprinklers Are Costly

- Last year the State Building Code Council (SBCC) study on “voluntary private Residential Fire Sprinkler Systems” found the actual costs of installation ranging from \$1.50 to \$8.50 a square foot. For a 2000 square foot home, this is a range of \$3,000 to \$17,000.
- The actual cost to homebuyers is much more than just the price of materials and labor. Factors such as taxes, permits, inspections as well as water hookup fees (determined by each local water district) can add thousands to the consumer’s cost of the system.

Fewer People Will Be Able To Afford A New Home

- According to NAHB, a \$5,000 increase in the cost of a home, prices 24,000 potential homebuyers out of the market.

Give The Fire Sprinkler Study A Chance To Work

- At the request of the Legislature, the SBCC Fire Sprinkler Technical Advisory Group (TAG) last year thoroughly evaluated and identified barriers to the voluntary installation of fire sprinklers. The TAG report not only identified the barriers, but also made recommendations to address these roadblocks to voluntary installation of fire sprinklers.
- Don’t mandate fire sprinklers in new homes—pursue the recommendations of the TAG and give them a chance to work.

Broadly Mandating Sprinklers Statewide Will Burden Homebuyers, Builders, And Local Jurisdictions Enforcing The Code.

- Not all jurisdictions are alike. Forcing all to comply is costly and unnecessary.

Fire Sprinklers Should Be A Voluntary Choice Left To The Consumer/Homebuyer.