

International Code Council Hijacked by Fire Sprinkler Coalition Worth of 2009 International Residential Code Highly Suspect

The ICC¹ since 1999 has been, up to now, a very good venue for debate and consensus on building code issues. However – after debate, after committee recommendations are made, after all the dialogue is done – the ICC hearings held in September 2008 in Minneapolis expose a fatal flaw in the organization’s final voting procedures. Originally established to prevent industry from packing the “voting booth” on a code issue, ICC final votes are restricted to government representatives. But what happens when one set of government representatives (fire service personnel), whose travel and hotel are paid for by industry (fire sprinkler manufacturers, installers and plumbers) pack the voting booth? You get the 2009 IRC – a code bought and paid for by companies who stand to make billions of dollars.

We stand strongly with everyone else to thank and commend the dedication and courage of the fire service community. But facts need to be injected into the emotion and pride we all feel about the people who protect us from fires. Requiring fire sprinklers in newly constructed 1&2 family homes is simply wrong. This requirement will cause a massive waste of consumer dollars for no life saving benefit, will exacerbate our already significant housing affordability problem, and completely fails to address the real threat to life and severe injury from home fires (i.e., older homes).

The facts are that, beginning in 1979, significant fire-safety building code requirements have been adopted in CT for new homes. Smoke detectors were first required in all new homes that year, and in 1985 smoke detectors were required to be hard wired with battery backup. Since then, additional fire-safety construction methods have been required (e.g., new, better electrical systems; fire stopping material in all wall and floor penetrations; fire-rated doors and walls between living space and garages or between connected units; larger, better egress openings – i.e., windows – to allow for easier escape and easier entry by fire service personnel).

The facts are that in looking at every fire death and every fire-caused life threatening injury in residential structures for a seven year period (2000 – 2006), not one occurred in a 1 or 2 family home built *after 1979 {check figures again}*. They have all been in older homes built before the fire-safety construction requirements were adopted.

But, let’s step back. What happened with the model 2009 IRC? See the following first-hand accounts from HBA executive officers who were there:

¹ The ICC (International Code Council) is the national body that writes the base model building codes for use throughout the United States. It was formed in 1999 when 3 former competing national model code writing organizations merged. A number of its codes are adopted by all the states, often with state specific amendments. Connecticut adopts ICC codes as its State Building Code, amended by our “CT Supplement.” Included within our State Building Code is the International Residential Code (IRC) (applicable to all 1&2 family homes), and the International Building Code (IBC) (applicable to all other buildings). The NFPA, National Fire Protection Association, refused to merge into the ICC and still writes its own model codes, including the National Electrical Code (NEC), which CT incorporates into our State Building Code.

