

## Home Builders & Remodelers Association of Connecticut, Inc.

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### **PLEASE OPPOSE Mandating Fire Sprinklers in all New Townhomes**

An issue for the Regulations Review Committee - Possibly to be included in the next proposed State Building Code is a requirement to install fire sprinklers in all new townhomes. A final decision is to be made Apr. 11 by the state Codes & Standards Committee.

- **Mandating Sprinklers in NEW Townhomes Does NOT Address Where Lives Are Lost.**
  - **88-90% of residential fires occur in homes that are 30 or more years old.** Almost every home fire death in CT where the age of the home is determined was in a home that is 30 or more years old.
  - **New homes and townhomes (which are built under the same code) are simply built better than they used to be,** incorporating better fire stopping materials, better electrical systems and installations, better egress (i.e., ways to get out of a home), and the use of hard wired, battery backup and interconnected smoke detectors, required since Oct 1, 1985, in new 1&2 family homes. **Homes built to older codes (pre 1985) are far more dangerous.**
  - **In future years, new homes built today will retain all of their life safety construction features.** Thus, tomorrow's old homes (those built today) will not be the same as today's old homes.
  - **Light frame (i.e., truss) construction – blamed by sprinkler proponents for safety issues – is not new.** Light frame (truss) construction has been used in home construction for over 50 years.
- **The cost for individual new townhome buyers would be \$10,000 for a typical new townhome.**
  - **Fire sprinklers are a choice townhome buyers should make for themselves.** All builders would be happy to install a fire sprinkler system in a new home if requested to do so by their customer.
  - **A Sprinkler mandate will make unaffordable a trend to build townhomes, a growing popular housing option for people.**
  - **There is nothing cost effective about mandating fire sprinklers.** Smoke detectors that are hardwired, with battery backup and cross connected (if 1 goes off, they all go off), currently required by the Code, are very effective at saving lives.
  - **There is one fire death for every 92,000 homes in CT.** Even assuming new construction is as fire-unsafe as 30-year old and older homes (*new construction is much safer*), society would have to put sprinklers in 92,000 units (well over \$1 billion) to save that next life from a fire. This also assumes sprinklers work 100% of the time (*they don't*), that home owners perform necessary annual maintenance (*they won't*), and ignores the fact that almost all deadly fires occur in homes built before 1985.
- **Adding costs to new homes keeps potential buyers in older homes, potentially increasing their risk of fire-related injuries or death.**
  - Since the vast majority of fire-related deaths occur in older homes, requiring sprinklers in newly constructed townhomes could actually increase a person's risk of injury and death from a home fire by keeping them in an older home, i.e., unable to afford or qualify for financing the purchase or rental or a new townhome.

**We respectfully ask the Regulations Review Committee to inject common sense and reason into this issue. If the next State Building Code comes to Regs Review with a sprinkler mandate, please reject the Code without prejudice and tell DAS/Codes & Standards to delete the mandate.**

See a better solution on reverse.

## **A Solution to Fire Deaths and Injuries – Far Better Than Mandatory Sprinklers**

The National and Connecticut Sprinkler Coalitions (made up primarily of fire service personnel, sprinkler manufacturers and sprinkler installers) has long sought to mandate the installation of fire sprinklers in 1&2 family homes (and townhomes built under the same 1&2 family building code).

We have opposed this mandate for many reasons, including the fact that the vast majority of residential fire deaths and serious injuries occur in homes built before 1985. Since then, the state's building codes have substantially changed to require many fire safe construction practices, including interconnected, hard-wired and battery backup smoke detectors, better egress requirements, much safer electrical systems, fire stopping for all wall and floor penetrations, and most recently (2017) - to address the so-called "light weight" construction practice that has existed for fifty years – CT requires fire proofing of floor joist assemblies. Other reasons include the huge cost of installation, much higher than sprinkler proponents claim, and numerous technical and logistical issues still not properly addressed.

The constant barrage of efforts by the sprinkler coalition to impose this costly requirement on new home owners ignores well-known facts that make the 1&2 family and townhouse sprinkler mandate defy common sense. Ask professionals who study fire science if the following is true:

- Medical calls makeup greater than 80% of all calls to fire departments
- Of the fire calls responded to, less than 10% are active fires
- Fire deaths occur in CT homes at a rate of about 1 in every 92,000 homes, and almost all are older homes (i.e., built pre-1985). CT builders currently are building 2,050 1&2 family homes per year.
- The lack of smoke detectors causes many more deaths than sprinklers will ever save. It's very common to find smoke alarms missing or disabled.
- Increased inspections of smoke alarms would reduce deaths and serious injuries. Thus, greater education of home owners about the need to inspect smoke detectors and about fire safe practices in the home would produce far better outcomes.
- Firefighting itself is changing. It is now focused on saving people and not the structure. Once it is confirmed that the building is unoccupied, fire fighters pull back and fight the fire from the exterior. There is much less risk to fire fighters being harmed by collapsing buildings using this technique.
- The design of entire fire departments is changing. Staffing, equipment, volunteer vs paid fire fighters all impact safety. The money proponents want society to spend on fire sprinklers in residential homes could be spent in these different areas of fire safety, as well as home owner education, and would save far more lives.
- Technology changes in the home are constantly improving home fire safety, making sprinklers even more irrelevant. These include smart stoves that auto shut off if left unattended or overheat, and induction cooktops that greatly reduce stovetop fires as flammable materials will not ignite if placed on the stovetop. Finally, if furnishings today are more of a fire hazard than older furniture, doesn't that call for regulating furniture manufacturing to target this hazard source?

**Mandating fire sprinklers in 1&2 family homes and townhouses is chasing the wrong solution to the fire safety problem. Please, say NO to the sprinkler coalition and work on better solutions, such as greater public education on the importance of properly operating smoke detectors and many other fire safe home living practices.**