

LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING PAPER MANDATORY SPRINKLER SYSTEMS

BACKGROUND:

The 2009 International Residential Code (IRC) requires sprinklers in new one- and two-family residences as of January 1, 2011. The 2006 IRC offered residential sprinkler systems as an option for local municipalities. The PA Department of Labor and Industry is expected to adopt the code in late 2009, when another mandate requiring sprinklers in townhouses will take effect.

The Pennsylvania Builders Association is opposed to mandatory sprinklers in new residential construction and is currently lobbying for an extension of the 2006 Uniform Construction Code.

The Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS® supports a three-year extension of the 2006 Uniform Construction Code.

KEY POINTS OF THE LEGISLATION:

House Bill 1808 (Buxton, D-Dauphin) amends the Uniform Construction Code Act to maintain the current 2006 International Code Council (ICC) standards in Pennsylvania until the 2012 ICC code changes are published.

House Bill 1809 (Buxton, D-Dauphin) would remove the impending residential sprinkler mandate in Pennsylvania and make it a municipal option under certain conditions

Senate Bill 1001 (Robbins, R-Crawford) would remove the impending residential sprinkler mandate in Pennsylvania and make it a municipal option under certain conditions

Senate Bill 1114 (Robbins, R-Crawford) would extend the 2006 code with a provision for a Legislative Budget and Finance

Committee study on all of the codes that is to be completed before the end of 2010.

TALKING POINTS:

1. **Pennsylvanians can't afford it. Mandatory sprinklers in new one- and two-family construction will drive up new home prices in Pennsylvania and stall the recovery of the housing sector and improvement of the Pennsylvania economy.** Mandatory sprinklers will increase the cost of a new home by thousands of dollars (\$7,500). NAHB research shows that for every \$1,000 increase in the cost of a new, median-priced home, 217,000 prospective buyers are forced out of the marketplace.

Building permits in Pennsylvania have fallen to 5,823 in July 2009 from a high of 21,097 in July 2004. Between 2007 and 2009, home sales declined 30 percent. With housing representing nearly 15 percent of Pennsylvania's gross state product, according to the NAHB, this is something we can't afford.

2. **Mandatory sprinklers are unnecessary to protect public safety. Research shows that hard-wired interconnected smoke detectors – already mandatory -- are the best way to prevent fire-related deaths.** Code advances, new technologies and improved building materials have greatly improved fire safety in recent years. According to the National Fire Incident Reporting System, in Pennsylvania there was a 99.7 percent chance of surviving a fire

in a one- or two-family home with an operating smoke-detector system.

Mandatory sprinklers would duplicate the protections already provided by mandatory smoke detectors, which is the proven, practical and cost-effective way to prevent fire deaths.

- 3. The decision to install additional fire-safety devices should be a consumer choice. Mandatory sprinklers are yet another unnecessary and expensive government mandate for Pennsylvanians.** In a recent survey, nearly 50 percent of Pennsylvania

voters said that reducing local taxes and fees are the most important issue for elected officials; 76 percent said officials should focus on economic expansion. Mandatory sprinklers represent another fee that restricts economic growth.

While 51 percent of those surveyed said public safety is more important than private property rights when they conflict, 67 percent said they would prefer a smoke detector system over a mandatory \$5,000 sprinkler system if they were to build a new home.

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