

Bill Introduced to Senate Could Benefit Chicago High-Rise Owners and Residents

Orland Park, IL (July 15, 2013) – U.S. Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.) and Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) introduced the Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act (FSIA) of 2013, legislation that strengthens tax incentives for building owners to retrofit their buildings with fire sprinklers that can save lives and countless dollars in property loss from fires. If passed, this legislation is good news for Chicago owners and occupants of high-rise buildings built before fire sprinklers were required by code in 1975.

Currently, building owners must depreciate fire sprinkler retrofits over a period of 39 years. The FSIA reclassifies fire sprinkler retrofits as 15-year depreciable property, allowing owners to receive tax benefits more quickly. This legislation provides a strong incentive for residential and commercial building owners to install critically needed fire sprinkler systems.

Illinois State Fire Marshal Larry Matkaitis believes Chicago's 2004 Life Safety Ordinance is not stringent enough compared to the state code, NFPA 101: Life Safety Code, and, therefore, does not comply with the state's minimum requirements. The Chicago ordinance requires all commercial high-rise buildings be retrofit with fire sprinklers, however, residential high-rise buildings only need to pass Chicago's Life Safety Evaluation (LSE), which the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) does not recognize. The LSE falls short of the minimum requirements of the Life Safety Code, often not requiring fire sprinklers or an engineered life-safety system. Proof that Chicago's LSE does fall short was a fire on December 10, 2009, on the thirty-sixth floor of the high-rise at 260 East Chestnut. The fire claimed the life of an 84-year-old woman. Prior to the fire, that very building passed the City of Chicago LSE.

Most buildings built prior to 1975 already have the basic infrastructure in place for retrofitting a fire sprinkler system such as the water supply, standpipes and in many cases the fire pumps. The standpipes simply need to be tapped and extended to the tenant spaces. Two high-rise buildings that comply with the state fire code after model fire sprinkler retrofit projects include McClurg Court Center (333 East Ontario) and Uptown Regency (5050 North Sheridan Road). High-rise occupants may also benefit from insurance savings for both tenant and building common areas.

About the Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board (NIFSAB)

NIFSAB is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting progressive legislation, raising public awareness, and educating code officials and governmental policy makers by demonstrating the proven performance of fire sprinklers in saving both lives and property. For more info, visit www.firesprinklerassoc.org.