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Tragic Fire in Rockford Highlights Need for Home Fire Sprinklers, Especially for High-Risk Populations

Fire occurs as Illinois fire service is advocating for home fire sprinkler requirements statewide.

Orland Park, IL (January 11, 2013) – On January 7, a tragic fire caused by a Christmas tree swept through a single-family home in Rockford, killing four people: a 10-month-old baby, 13-year-old boy, a special-needs man in his 20s, and a woman in her 60s. Two other family members were able to escape, however, they had to be taken to a hospital to be treated. The fire marks eight total residential fire deaths in Illinois already this year.

Tom Lia, executive director of the nonprofit Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board (NIFSAB) says the fire is an unfortunate example of a home fire where high-risk individuals are present, citing reports from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) that state those at highest risk from fires include young children, the elderly, and those with disabilities.

“The fire is the second multiple-fatality home fire involving high-risk populations this year, and it’s still only the first two weeks of January,” notes Lia. He mentions a house fire that occurred on New Year’s Day and claimed the lives of two paralyzed brothers in Randolph County in southern Illinois. “Individuals in high-risk categories may have trouble comprehending a fire and may not be able to escape a fire on their own. Home fire sprinklers can prevent fires from spreading and, in these cases, allow for others to help the occupants safely escape.”

Last year alone, the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) reported at least 95 residential fire fatalities in Illinois.¹ Meanwhile, requirements for fire sprinklers in one- and two- family homes have been present since 2006 in national model fire and building codes from both of the major code-governing bodies, the NFPA and the International Code Council.

“Home fire deaths in Illinois and across the nation are occurring at an alarming rate, yet we now have the ability to adopt these national model codes that include fire sprinklers, preventing future fire deaths,” says Lia.

Currently, 88 individual municipalities and fire protection districts throughout Illinois have home fire sprinkler ordinances, however, Rockford does not. In an effort to protect citizens statewide, Illinois State Fire Marshal Larry Matkaitis and other Illinois fire service leaders are aligning together to update the State’s current edition of NFPA 101 Life Safety Code to the 2012 edition. The code update would require fire sprinkler protection in new construction one- and two-family homes and townhomes across the State.

“California and Maryland have already adopted statewide legislation,” states Lia. “By adopting the latest fire and building codes here in Illinois, we can ensure that residents are protected in their own homes and prevent horrific fires such as the fire in Rockford from occurring in the future. It will also move Illinois to the forefront of fire protection technology nationally.”

Lia also reminds the public that the winter season can be a dangerous time for residential fires with an increase in cooking fires, electrical fires caused by improperly used decorations, and fires caused by space heaters.²

“We offer our sincere condolences to the family and friends of the fire victims in Rockford,” he adds.

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.

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¹ U.S. Fire Administration, “Residential Fire Fatalities in the News.” apps.usfa.fema.gov/civilian-fatalities/incident/reportMap

² National Fire Protection Association, “Project Holiday.” www.nfpa.org/displaycontent.asp?categoryid=1932