

Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board Applauds Daley For Re-Visiting High Rise Retrofit Issue

In the wake of the two high-rise fires last week that resulted in two fatalities and eight firefighter injuries, the Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board (NIFSAB) applauds Mayor Daley and the City of Chicago for revisiting the high-rise fire sprinkler retrofit issue.

Tom Lia, NIFSAB Executive Director said that if the two high-rise buildings had fire sprinkler systems, the deaths and firefighter injuries would have been prevented. The two buildings were constructed before the 1975 City of Chicago Municipal Code requiring fire sprinkler systems. "We support Mayor Daley and will work with his office to implement a plan to retrofit Chicago's high-rises," Lia said. "It's important that the plan includes sprinkler protection in tenant space and hallways," he added. Referring to the 1999 "Chicago High-Rise Safety Commission Report", Lia said all the background research and work is complete.

The Report was the result of a Commission formed in 1996 consisting of elected and appointed government officials, building owners and managers, sprinkler companies, organized labor and engineering firms. The Commission discovered that the rate of fire deaths in Chicago's high-rise buildings is approximately 3.5 times greater than the national average. More than 800 high-rise buildings do not have fire sprinklers.

Lia said the timing is right for the City of Chicago to develop a plan since the Illinois State Fire Marshal passed the 2000 Edition of the NFPA Lifesafety 101 Code requiring high-rise buildings to be retrofitted with sprinklers. "Now it's up to the city to determine how it will adhere to the code," he said. "And the 20-year plan recommended by the High-Rise Commission will allow for an orderly phase-in."

According to the National Fire Sprinkler Association (NFSA) the cost to retrofit a high-rise building ranges between \$2.50 to \$3.50 per square foot. The fire sprinkler system is connected to the standpipe system. All Chicago high-rise buildings are equipped with a fire standpipe system and pump. The standpipe, usually found in the building stairwell, provides the water for firefighter hoses on each floor.

Many buildings have containment walls, also known as compartmentation, which prevent fires from spreading. "Containment walls do not protect occupants in the room of origin and they do not prevent deadly smoke from spreading throughout the building," Lia said.

Lia said people who live and work in Chicago high-rise buildings built before 1975 should have the same level of protection as buildings built today. "If a fire started in a room with automatic fire sprinklers, the sprinkler closest to the fire would activate and immediately start controlling the fire. Often, the sprinkler will control the fire before the fire department arrives at the scene," he added.

"I hope Mayor Daley and the City of Chicago move forward with the High-Rise Safety Commission recommendation before there is another tragedy, to protect the lives of people who occupy the buildings and to protect the City's firefighters," Lia said.

For more information, call NIFSAB toll-free at 866-2NIFSAB.