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Fire Sprinkler Advisory Group Uses Billboard To Send a Strong Message about High-Rise Fire Safety

December 29, 2003, Orland Park, IL—The Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board is using a billboard to send a strong message to people who live and work in high-rise buildings. The billboard, located at Grand and LaSalle, states that a high-rise without fire sprinklers is not a place to live or work. Too often it's a place to die. It includes a photo of the Cook County Administration Building with smoke billowing out of the windows. Viewers are encouraged to support passage of Chicago's high-rise fire sprinkler ordinance.

“We want to send a strong message, especially to people who live in high-rise buildings,” said Tom Lia, Executive Director, Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board (NIFSAB). “People who live in high-rise buildings without fire sprinklers need to understand that they are at risk of dying if there is a fire in their building.”

More than 800 Chicago high-rise buildings are currently not protected with fire sprinkler systems because they were constructed before the 1975 City of Chicago Municipal Code requiring fire sprinkler systems.

Following the deadly fire at the Cook County Administration Building in October where six people died, Alderman Edward M. Burke (14th) introduced an ordinance requiring all Chicago high-rise buildings built before the 1975 ordinance be retrofit with a fire sprinkler system. Mayor Richard Daley introduced an ordinance that requires only commercial high-rise buildings be retrofit with fire sprinkler systems.

The billboard is scheduled for the month of January while the Chicago Building Committee hears testimony regarding the ordinances. The Chicago City Council is expected to vote on the ordinance **February 6th**.

“It’s vital that the ordinance does include residential high-rise buildings”, Lia said. Citing the National Fire Protection Association’s “High-Rise Building Fires” Report (September 2001), Lia said most high-rise building fires and associated losses occur in apartment buildings. “If you look at the high-rise fires that occurred over the last few years here in Chicago, people died in residential high-rise fires. Excluding residential buildings in the ordinance would be a deadly mistake.”

According to the Chicago High-Rise Commission Report, the rate of fire deaths in Chicago’s high-rise buildings is approximately 3.5 times greater than the national average. Residential buildings are at greatest risk: 86% of all Chicago high-rise fires were in residential structures, and approximately 85% of those buildings did not have sprinklers.

“We hope people will see the billboard and let their building managers and owners and elected officials know that they support Alderman Burke’s ordinance,” Lia said. “It’s important to retrofit all high-rise buildings, both commercial and residential, to protect occupants and firefighters. “

For more information visit www.firesprinklerassoc.org.

NIFSAB is a non-profit organization composed of fire officials, contractors, building officials, suppliers, architects, engineers, and manufacturers. NIFSAB is dedicated to educating and informing the public and elected and appointed officials of the vital role that fire sprinklers play in fire protection.

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