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## **High-Rise Fire Survivors Will Testify at Chicago Building Committee Meeting**

### **Hearing Follows Another Deadly High-Rise Fire**

December 9, 2003, Orland Park, IL—Two Chicago high-rise residents who survived deadly fires in their buildings will share the terrifying details of their experience and urge members of the Chicago Building Committee to support a new fire safety ordinance requiring fire sprinklers in Chicago's residential and commercial high-rise buildings.

The hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, December 10, 2003, 1 p.m. room 201A at City Hall.

The hearing is in the wake of two high-rise fires that occurred in Chicago over the weekend, killing one resident and injuring many others. Early Saturday morning, Denise Turski, a 49-year old podiatrist was found dead inside her 10<sup>th</sup> floor apartment at Sandburg Village apartments in Old Town. She was overcome by smoke following a fire in her unit.

Four children were injured during a Sunday morning fire at the Cabrini-Green public housing development at 1161 N. Larrabee. Chicago firefighters ran up eight flights and forced their way into an apartment to rescue a 14-year-old girl. The young victim was treated for smoke inhalation and remains in serious condition. Three other children were treated at Children's Memorial Hospital for smoke inhalation.

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Scheduled to testify at Wednesday's hearing is Maureen Marley who has lived on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor at 260 E. Chestnut Street for 34 years. She was the first to call 9-1-1 after a fire started in her neighbor's apartment January 21, 2002. The smoke and heat were so intense in the hallway, Marley was trapped in her apartment. Her neighbor died and eight firefighters were injured. Marley had to live in a hotel for nine months while her apartment was repaired.

Dennis Mushol, an 18-year veteran of the Chicago Police Department, lives on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor at Lake Park Plaza on Pine Grove Avenue. He has experienced two fires in his building, the first occurred March 8, 2000, the second February 19, 2002. In both fires, Mushol's apartment filled with smoke. Mushol was able to escape by exiting through the stairwell. Once outside the building, Mushol watched as firefighters fought the ferocious blaze that fully engulfed the apartment two doors away from his. His neighbor in the unit where the fire started suffered severe burns.

In the second fire, it was more difficult for Mushol to escape because so many people were in the stairwell that eventually filled with smoke. One resident who lived on the ninth floor died in that fire. He was found lying unresponsive on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the smoke filled stairwell.

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

Following the deadly fire at the Cook County Administration Building in October where six people died, Alderman Edward M. Burke (14<sup>th</sup>) 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.

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“It’s vital that the ordinance does include residential high-rise buildings,” said Tom Lia, Executive Director, Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board (NIFSAB). 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.

Lia said it’s important to retrofit all high-rise buildings, both commercial and residential, to protect occupants and firefighters. “Think about the eight Chicago firefighters who were injured while fighting the Chestnut Building fire. It’s almost two years later and two of them are still on disability,” he said. “If the high-rise ordinance is passed, Chicago’s firefighters will also be protected.”

For more information visit [www.firesprinklerassoc.org](http://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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