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Hyde Park High-Rise Fire Death Could Have Been Prevented If The Building Had Fire Sprinkler Protection

June 27, 2003—Fire sprinklers could have prevented the death of a woman on the 22nd floor of a condominium on the 4800 block of South Chicago Beach Drive if the high-rise would have been protected with a fire sprinkler system, according to the Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board (NIFSAB).

Tom Lia, NIFSAB Executive Director said that the building was constructed before the 1975 City of Chicago Municipal Code requiring fire sprinkler systems.

“If a fire starts in a room with automatic fire sprinklers, the sprinkler closest to the fire activates and immediately starts controlling the fire. Often, the sprinkler will extinguish the fire before the fire department arrives at the scene,” he added.

According to NIFSAB, there are more than 800 high-rise buildings in Chicago that do not have fire sprinkler systems.

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Fire Sprinklers

Add One

“We will continue to see deaths and injuries to people who live and work in high-rises and to firefighters who respond to these fires as long as these buildings remain unprotected,” Lia said.

Lia said his non-profit organization has been working with the City to help them implement a plan to retrofit high-rise buildings.

“Unfortunately, not a lot has happened since the last fatal high-rise fire at 260 E. Chestnut where one woman was killed and eight firefighters were injured,” Lia said referring to the deadly fire that occurred January 2002.

According to Lia, the timing is right for the City of Chicago to implement a plan to retrofit these buildings 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.

Referring to the 1999 “Chicago High-Rise Safety Commission Report”, Lia said all the background research and work is complete. “Now a Technical Advisory Committee should be set up to implement the plan,” Lia added.

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.

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Fire Sprinklers

Add Two

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 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.

“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. Chicago High-Rise Safety Commission Report is also available on the web at www.firesprinklerassoc.org.

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