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## **Fire Sprinkler Group Says BOMA Misinformed Chicago Media About High-Rise Retrofit Issue**

January 28, 2004, Orland Park, IL—According to the non-profit Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board (NIFSAB), the Building Owners and Managers Association of Chicago did not provide accurate information during a meeting with the Chicago Tribune's editorial board.

Referring to the article "Sprinkler law could put squeeze on city's high-rises" that appeared in the Tribune, January 23, 2004, a NIFSAB spokesperson said representatives from BOMA did not provide accurate information about the cost to install fire sprinklers retrofit in high-rise buildings, utilization of existing fire pumps and standpipe infrastructure and fires and fire death data.

"It's a true disappointment to see how misinformed the BOMA group is with an issue that is dealing with life-safety," said Tom Lia, NIFSAB Executive Director.

In the article, the group claimed that it would cost about \$10 a square foot to retrofit fire sprinklers in a high-rise building. According to Lia, the cost is \$2.50 to \$3.50 per square foot.

"We looked at the numbers from high-rise buildings in Chicago that have been retrofit with a fire sprinkler system. They all fall in the \$2.50 to \$3.50 range, some even less," Lia said. According to Lia, the building at 910 S. Michigan averaged \$1.50 per square foot. North Park Village Apartments averaged \$2.92 per square foot. The building at 332 S. Michigan ranged from \$1.82 in the basement to \$2.33 per square foot on the floors that had offices.

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## High-Rise Sprinklers Add One

“None of our numbers come close to \$10 per square foot,” Lia said. “The fire sprinkler industry has quite a few retrofit jobs to back up the numbers. In 1996, it cost an average of \$4.75 to retrofit the Union League Club. That building has offices, meeting rooms, hotel guest rooms and a health club. Most of the work was done at night on overtime rates. The cost per square foot included cutting and patching the ornamental plaster ceilings, but that is the highest cost that we have seen and it includes incidental work,” Lia said.

“The BOMA representatives are also misinformed about a fire sprinkler system’s infrastructure,” Lia said. In the Tribune article BOMA officials said much of the expense is concentrated in the early stages of installation for system infrastructure such as pumps and controls.

“All of Chicago’s high-rise buildings that do not have fire sprinklers already have the infrastructure in place,” Lia said. “When retrofitting a high-rise building, the fire sprinkler system is connected to the standpipe system. That is how the system is being installed now at the Cook County Administration Building at 69 W. Washington. All high-rise buildings are equipped with a fire standpipe system and fire pump. The standpipe, usually found in the building stairwell provides the water for firefighters hoses on each floor and for the fire sprinkle retrofit, Lia said.”

Lia said he also questions the building manager group’s fire data. “When you add up their numbers, it looks like BOMA’s researchers used data from the National Fire Protection Association’s “High-Rise Building Fires” Report.

“The NFPA Report clearly states that not all fires are reported to NFPA and the information presented should not be considered complete. The fires listed in the report provide NFPA with enough information to provide an analysis only,” Lia said.

Lia said the NFPA Report does not list any high-rise fires in Chicago during the year 2000. “During that year, there were at least 24 fires in high-rise buildings that resulted in 10 deaths, 55 injuries and more than \$357,000 estimated dollar losses for fire damage,” Lia said.

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## High-Rise Sprinklers Add Two

Lia said BOMA officials fail to talk about the savings associated with installing fire sprinklers in existing high-rise buildings.

“Any commercial building in the downtown district as defined by Chicago is eligible to utilize Tax Increment Financing (TIF funds),” Lia said.

Another savings is fire insurance. According to Lia, when a building is retrofit with a fire sprinkler system, the fire insurance savings can range from 20% to 60% for common areas. Tenant space or homeowner area savings can range from 5% to 20%.

“The condo association at the high-rise building at 3930 Pine Grove Drive learned that they could save \$75,000 alone on the common area fire insurance. That’s a 20% savings from their \$400,000 policy,” Lia said.

There were two separate fires in the Pine Grove building with one fatality. The original insurance company dropped their coverage and the building was placed in a high-risk policy category. Their insurance increased from \$40,000 to \$400,000 per year.

“If fire sprinklers are installed in that building, it will be taken out of the high risk policy category and their insurance costs will decrease,” Lia said.

“The high-rise retrofit ordinance is an extremely important life-safety issue. It’s important that BOMA has the correct facts and information,” Lia said. “The Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board will work with BOMA or any association to help them understand real costs and issues related to installing fire sprinkler systems. That’s what we are here for,” Lia said.

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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