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Follow-Up to LaSalle Bank Fire - Facts about Chicago High-Rise Building Fire Protection

Orland Park, IL (December 7, 2004) – The Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board (NIFSAB) offers the following information pertaining to the high-rise sprinkler retrofit ordinance issue currently being considered by the City of Chicago.

Thumbnail of Pending High-Rise Ordinances in Building Committee

Two ordinances are pending. Alderman Edward Burke's (14th) ordinance requires sprinklers in all high-rise buildings, commercial and residential. The ordinance requires installation to be completed by 2008. Mayor Richard Daley's ordinance requires all commercial high-rise buildings to be retrofit by 2016. Daley's ordinance excludes landmark and historical high-rise buildings. *NOTE:* The LaSalle Bank building was designated a landmark by the City of Chicago on February 9, 1994 and would not be covered by Mayor Daley's ordinance.

National Consensus Code Requirements

NFPA 101, *Life Safety Code*®, was adopted by the State of Illinois Fire Marshal in January 2002. The Code is valid for new and existing buildings and is retroactive, thus all high-rises are required right now to have fire sprinklers or an Engineered Life Safety System. High-rises would have the option of fire sprinklers or an engineered life safety system. The *Life Safety Code*, which is used in every state and adopted statewide in 38 states, is developed and published by the nonprofit National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

Findings of Recent Studies

Four independent reports have been officially and voluntarily commissioned to review Chicago high-rise buildings and all have verified that sprinklers would have prevented lives lost:

- Chicago High-Rise Commission (voluntary commission)
- Tri-Data Study (City of Chicago contracted)
- Cook County, Abner Mikva Commission on the 69 W. Washington fire
- State of Illinois, James Lee Witt & Associates on the 69 W. Washington fire

The recently released James Lee Witt & Associates report on the 2003 Cook County Administration Building fire verified that the adopted *Life Safety Code* contains more stringent fire sprinkler requirements than the *Municipal Code of Chicago*. The Witt report recommends the City of Chicago “ensure compliance with the state code” and “require installation of automatic fire sprinkler systems in all high-rise buildings.”

Basic Retrofit Cost

Reviews of sprinkler retrofit installation costs, including two representative Chicago high-rise buildings (6007 Sheridan Road and 3930 Pine Grove Drive), provide an exemplar basic cost estimate: \$2.50 - \$3.50 per square foot. (Based on conducting the work on a routine daytime basis; no overtime, double crews, or accelerated schedule.)

It should be noted the underground water main supply, fire pump and fire standpipe risers are already in place in high-rise buildings, and should not be included in cost estimates. Only the fire sprinkler cross main, branch line pipes and sprinkler heads are needed in individual tenant and office spaces.

U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency

For more than 30 years, FEMA's U.S. Fire Administration has advocated for the use of automatic fire sprinklers to save lives, reduce injuries and protect property. USFA's National Residential Fire Sprinkler Initiative was undertaken to overcome "barriers inhibiting the acceptance and use of residential fire sprinklers to reduce life loss and injuries".

America Burning – Fire sprinklers are singled out as the most effective fire loss prevention and reduction measure in this watershed report commissioned originally in 1973 by the President of the United States and in the two subsequent federally-required reviews of the report since.

Life Safety Summit – In an effort to reduce firefighter deaths and injuries by 50% in 10 years, one recommendation is to improve fire codes and adopt residential sprinkler codes.

Solutions 2000 – This national symposium, convened to address fire safety concerns among young children, older adults and people with disabilities, affirmed the need for automatic fire sprinkler systems to protect these high-fire-risk groups.

Pending State Legislation: Senate Bill 2466, introduced by State Senator Martinez (D-Chicago), provides for a one-time \$2,500 tax break for the year in which the fire sprinkler system is installed, with an additional \$100 exemption each year thereafter that the system remains in place, when the property is owned and used exclusively for a residential purpose. The bill is dead.

Pending Federal Legislation: Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA) has introduced S2860, Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act of 2004, which calls for an amendment to the tax code to classify automatic fire sprinklers as a five-year property for purposes of depreciation as opposed to the current 27.5 or 39 year period for installations in residential or commercial properties. A similar House Bill, HR1824, Fire Sprinkler Tax Incentive Act (2003), has 130 co-sponsors.

For more information, visit www.firesprinklerassoc.org.