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## **Latest Chicago High-Rise Fire is a National Wake up Call “This could happen in your city too.”**

Orland Park, IL (December 9, 2004) – The LaSalle Bank building fire in Chicago is the latest case in point that new and existing high-rise buildings in every city should be fully protected by installed automatic fire sprinkler systems. Fire sprinklers save lives, prevent injuries, and protect property and contents – automatically and immediately – at the first sign of fire.

Thirty-seven people were reported injured in the fire, including two-dozen firefighters. The massive and stubborn fire required more than 300 firefighters on the scene and a third of the City’s equipment. Sprinklers are not installed on the floor of fire origin; in fact, sprinklers are only installed in the basement and concourse levels.

Without sprinklers to control the flames, tremendous heat and poisonous smoke build up quickly, and can spread throughout the building – as happened in the LaSalle Bank fire – making a safe escape difficult if not impossible.

Unsprinklered building fires also present a more dangerous and more challenging search-and-rescue and firefighting environment for emergency responders. Many LaSalle fire survivors had to be escorted out of the thick smoke by firefighters.

“This could happen in your city too,” says Tom Lia, executive director of the Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board (NIFSAB). “A devastating fire like LaSalle could happen in any city where high-rise buildings remain unprotected by sprinklers.”

With few exceptions (Atlanta, Louisville, Philadelphia among them), most cities in the U.S. do not require existing high-rise buildings to be retrofit with sprinklers. That leaves millions of residents and other occupants vulnerable if fire breaks out in an unsprinklered building. “When you consider that many of these unprotected high-rise buildings are residential, the potential for grave loss is obvious,” Lia adds.

In October 2003, a tragic fire in Chicago’s Cook County Administration high-rise building killed six people and injured eight others. More than 800 high-rise buildings in Chicago remain unsprinklered today despite two separate

retrofit ordinances that have been stalled in Chicago's Building Committee. One ordinance proposed retrofitting all high-rises; the other ordinance proposed retrofitting only commercial high-rises.

"Chicago has had ample studies, reports, and commissions to warrant the adoption of an ordinance to sprinker the City's high-rise buildings," Lia said referring to studies completed years before the Cook County fire including the *Chicago High-Rise Commission Report* and the *Tri-Data Study*. Following the Cook County fire, the Abner Mikva Commission enlisted by Cook County and James Lee Witt commissioned by the State of Illinois released reports.

Lia said the results of the studies have gone unheeded time and again pointing to the LaSalle fire as the latest example. "Millions of city and state dollars have been spent on studies that reinforce what fire protection engineers and safety advocates have been saying for decades: fire sprinklers would have saved lives," Lia said. "How many more people will have to be injured or die before Chicago's Building Committee decides on one ordinance or another?"

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), there were more than 15,000 high-rise building fires in the U.S. in 1999, the latest year for which the association has national data.

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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.

**For copies of the reports and more information visit**

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