



Builders and Consumers May Get Soaked

Residential fires may not be considered disasters for the purpose of large scale emergency planning and preparedness, but they are disasters nonetheless. Like other disaster types, detailed statistics are kept. The U.S. Fire Administration, an entity of the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency, reports that in 2007 there were an estimated 1.6 million fires resulting in direct property loss of \$15.6 billion and 3,430 civilian lives lost.

It was these statistics and others like it that were used to justify the need for change at the building code hearings of the International Code Council held this past fall. Changes were approved to the International Residential Code (IRC), and therefore, fire sprinklers will be required in all new homes built in communities that adopt the 2009 IRC.

In a nod to builders and the market impacts of the regulation, the fire sprinkler provisions of the 2009 IRC will not become effective until Jan. 1, 2011. Not only is this delay needed for the home building industry, it is apparent that the sprinkler industry also needs time to increase its capacity. A recent report issued by ResidentialFireSprinkler.com suggests that the market potential for residential fire sprinkler installations exceeds \$3 billion annually and that over 10,000 additional skilled workers are needed to accommodate the demand mandated by code. It remains to be seen if the year 2011 effective date will ultimately apply in Texas or if state or local governments will enact further delays.

Underscoring the importance of the Texas registration and licensing laws, State Fire registration and licensing laws, State Fire Marshal Paul Maldonado states "Installing fire sprinklers in one- and two-family dwellings will save lives and property and is one the most important fire protection measures on the horizon. The State of Texas has adopted sprinkler licensing laws to ensure these systems are designed and installed by competent individuals. When fire is approaching your sleeping children and loved ones, the fire sprinkler system must work the first time, every time. You do not have the opportunity to go back and fix it the next day.

The system may be costly but some savings are realized in NFPA 13D systems through the use of lower pressure rated piping and location of sprinkler heads. The intent of the installed system is to get people out of the building before heat and smoke impair safe passage rather than protect the property. Although it is anticipated that property loss is likely to be reduced, because fires that start in an area containing a fire sprinkler are usually extinguished or at least partially controlled until the fire department arrives.

Provided that the 2009 edition of the IRC is adopted by a municipality and no action is taken by the State of Texas, home builders throughout Texas must comply with the fire sprinkler provisions of the IRC beginning January 1, 2011. As this date approaches, the Texas Association of Builders and the National Association of Home Builders will help provide guidance and resources to ensure that this regulatory mandate is implemented in a way that is fair and cost efficient for both builder and the home buying public.