

# Mandatory Residential Fire Sprinklers

## TALKING POINTS



While the General Assembly will deal with a variety of subjects, there are several issues of importance to home builders that are likely to receive consideration this session:

### MANDATORY FIRE SPRINKLER BILLS

#### (S.1057/H.4663)

For several years now special interests have been pushing to have residential fire sprinklers mandated in every new home in America. In 2009, these special interests were finally successful in getting residential fire sprinklers mandated in the IRC 2009. Unless state legislation is passed to opt out of this provision of the SC building code, every new house built in SC built after January 1, 2011 will be required to have fire sprinklers.

#### MESSAGE

Residential fire sprinkler mandates are the largest assault on affordable housing in the last ten years. The real issue here is consumer choice versus government mandates. Why should the government mandate the use of a product that consumers overwhelmingly choose not to use? Please support consumer choice by supporting S.1057 and H.4663.

**1. Government mandates are unnecessary.** Why should the state government mandate fire sprinklers when consumers have consistently indicated that they do not want them? No law on record prevents home owners from installing fire sprinklers in their home today, however, very few home owners choose to have them installed because they see sprinklers as expensive, unnecessary, and a high cost to benefit expenditure. Consumer choice is best!

**2. Smoke detectors provide excellent protection.** The SC Building Code requires hard-wired smoke detectors in all new homes. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reports that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2000-04) 65% of home fire deaths were in homes with no smoke alarms (43%), or no working smoke alarm (22%). The NFPA also reported that the chance of surviving a home fire then working smoke detectors are present is **99.45%**!

**3. Fire sprinklers are very expensive.** The actual cost quoted in SC (January 2010) is \$4-\$6/square foot for the installation of the sprinkler equipment alone. In addition, the cost of installing water lines, tap or water usage fees, and meters to the house to handle the increased water capacity could easily add another \$3-\$4 per square foot to the cost.

**Total cost per house:** \$7,000-\$21,000

**Total cost to taxpayers:** \$210 million/year

**4. Housing affordability will hurt.** For every \$1,000 increase in the cost of a house, 25,000 low-income first-time SC home buyers will be forced out of the market. They will be forced to stay in older, less safe homes and the economy will suffer as well. The mandate also threatens a recovering SC home building industry that is expected to build 17,000 homes in 2010, which will generate \$2.7 billion in income for SC residents, generate \$586 million in state/local taxes, and fund 48,552 jobs in SC this year.

**5. Fire sprinkler debate should not focus on new homes.** If the goal is to reduce fire fatalities, the focus should be on older homes and mobile homes, not new homes. Residential fire sprinklers are more effective in the reduction of fire damage to property than they are to reducing residential fire fatalities.

**6. Other states have rejected these mandates.** Twenty-two other states (Georgia, Florida, Arizona, Rhode Island, Vermont, Maine, West Virginia, Connecticut, Kansas, Iowa, Alabama, South Dakota, North Dakota, New Mexico, Idaho, Utah, Texas, Missouri, Washington, Minnesota, Arkansas and Tennessee) have already passed legislation to stop mandatory fire sprinkler mandates with others, including North Carolina, expected to follow quickly. Only California and Maryland have adopted sprinklers.