

Boston

May 9, 2011

Massachusetts Department of Public Safety
Board of Building Regulations and Standards
One Ashburton Place
13th Floor-Room 1301
Boston, ma 02108

Dear Board of Building Regulations and Standards:

As the Fire Commissioner for the Boston Fire Dept., I stand in solidarity with other Fire Officials in Massachusetts in favor of the position that all new construction one and two-family dwellings, should be built with fire sprinklers installed to protect the public, fire service personnel, the structure, its contents, the environment and the economy. These life-saving systems respond quickly and effectively to the presence of a fire. When sprinklers are present, they save lives. If you have a reported fire in your home, the risk of dying decreases by about 80 percent when sprinklers are present. People in homes with sprinklers are protected against significant property loss-sprinklers reduce the average property loss by 71% per fire. Model safety codes now require the use of home fire sprinklers in new one- and two-family homes. These requirements offer the highest level of safety to protect the people of your community.

I would like to comment on 3 aspects of this issue.

1. Normally it is important to have ‘uniformity’ in a building Code, particularly at the state level. However, a policy that strives for “uniformity in application” should be based on a “uniformity of conditions.” This is true for most items in the building code. For example, I am not aware of any conditional difference between a city of 600,000 and a town of 6,000 in regards to the electrical code. Although I am not an electrician I suspect that lamps and televisions operate the same way in both communities. In the case of fire safety, an assumption of equivalent conditions is not logical. Major cities can have 4-8 firefighters respond to a house fire approximately 4 minutes and 20-30 firefighters in 8-10 minutes. Smaller communities may be able to provide only a small fraction of these resources with response time much longer than these. The specific problem in Massachusetts was described in great detail by the Boston Globe several years ago in a series appropriately titled “Deadly Delay.” This unfortunate fact of life in Massachusetts suggests the benefit of looking at the issue of fire requirement in the building code at a local level. <http://www.boston.com/news/specials/fires/>



Thomas M. Menino, Mayor/FIRE DEPARTMENT/115 Southampton Street 02118

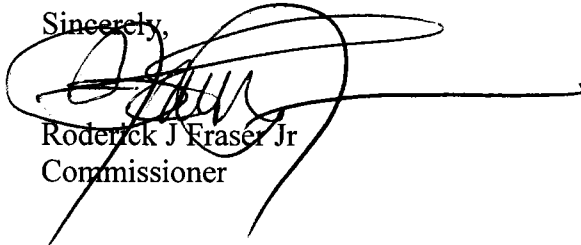
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2. There appears to be some disagreement about how much this requirement will cost, but there appears to be no disagreement that cost may vary from town to town, based on local requirements. This fact of life in Massachusetts also suggests the benefit of looking at the issue of fire requirement in the building code at a local level.
3. It has been stated by some opponents that fires and fire deaths have been going down so there is no need for sprinklers. However, fire deaths and fires have been going down since the turn of the century. If we were to follow this logic we would never have adopted many of the fire safety requirements that we now have for protecting life and property. In addition, many cost saving items for consumers such as the increase use of synthetic materials and truss construction have benefited pocketbooks at the price of increased risk to the public and firefighters. Any future cost of sprinklers should be balanced against the historical cost saving due to new construction techniques and new materials that have in part made sprinklers necessary. Fires are growing faster and buildings have less fire resistance than 30 years ago. This deadly combination has led to situations that have often proven deadly for the public as well as the firefighters who attempt to save them.

In my opinion, this regulation would allow each community to balance the cost in the local community, as well as the benefit to the local community taking into account local conditions. It is an important and, logical progression for the Massachusetts Building Code.

Sincerely,



Roderick J Fraser Jr
Commissioner