

MEMORANDUM

TO: Adam Curry
Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors

FROM: Gail L. McCauley
White Township Supervisor, Indiana County

DATE: September 22, 2009

SUBJECT: Mandatory Residential Sprinkler System

Mr. Curry, I would like an opportunity to address the UCC Committee in October, 2009 regarding the issue of mandatory residential sprinkler systems.

First, I attended the ICC Conference the fall of 2009 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. As a township supervisor, I am a member of the Indiana-Armstrong County Builders Association.

It is my understanding the ICC recommended the mandatory sprinkler issue be turned down. However, the issue was brought before the delegates.

Approximately 700 firemen were bussed to the conference for the purpose of voting in favor of mandatory sprinklers. These firemen stayed long enough to vote on the following:

1. They voted to change the "burn time" for firewalls between townhouse condominiums from two hours to one. This makes absolutely no sense—why take a step backward.
2. Their second vote, of course, was to require a sprinkler system in all new residential construction. After this vote was taken and the firemen began to leave, the moderators made repeated requests for them to stay as other issues regarding resident and firemen safety would be coming to the floor for a vote. They did not stay but were bussed to a nearby casino.

Firemen Safety--Resident Safety

Had the fireman stayed, the very next issue was flooring that would prevent first floors falling into basements because of basement fires. In fact, one firefighter passionately addressed this very issue prior to the sprinkler vote being taken.

1. It was proposed to require one-half inch dry wall/wall board on the underside of flooring which has about a two hour burn time. Thereby, preventing the collapse of first floor structures—protecting residents and firefighters. (Note: TJI—engineered floor trusses failed in 9 minutes; Lumber 2" x 10" failed in 35 minutes.
2. It would be most beneficial to all concerned to address roof trusses. Trusses are held together by metal cleats. When the cleats become hot, the metal expands, the trusses fail, and the roof will collapse. The trusses should not only be cleated but also nailed. By adding

nails you increase the structural integrity of the trusses. Thereby, preventing the collapse of the roof—protecting residents and firefighters.

Smoke Detectors—Sprinklers

Smoke will reach smoke detectors and warn occupants before a fire burns hot enough to set-off the sprinkler system.

When firemen and sprinkler companies present the data of the number of house fires, loss of property, and loss of life, please consider the age of the structure. More fire retardant materials are used in new home construction.

Most fires are electrical in nature. I believe in 2010 new regulations go into effect requiring arc fault breakers in every room thereby reducing the possibility of an electrical fire.

Economy

Our economy is tied to new home construction. By requiring mandatory residential sprinkler systems you will be adding \$5,000.00 to \$10,000.00 to the construction cost. Lower income families who cannot afford a building lot in an established subdivision usually go to rural areas to purchase a lot they can afford. There are no sewer lines or city water. They have to install a septic system and drill a well. With a sprinkler system it may be necessary to drill a second well or install a water tank. Water tanks are not practical because of freezing. You may think, bury the water tank. This is not a case of “one size fits all.” To bury a tank to prevent freezing you would need to bury it below the frost line—in Western Pennsylvania we have TO MUCH ROCK to make this affordable and feasible. Well water pumps are operated by electricity—What happens when the power is out? Also, what happens if the water pressure is low?

To force this amount of added expense on home buyers is unreasonable, cost prohibitive, and in some cases discriminatory against lower and lower middle income families.

Did you know this idea originated in San Clemente, California, where the average price of a home is \$372,000.00? If you can afford \$372,000.00 what is another \$5,000.00 or \$10,000.00 for a sprinkler system. In Indiana County the median household income in 2007 was \$33,441.00 and the median house or condo value in 2007 was \$98,500.00. People simply will not be able to afford the American dream of home ownership.

To date I have not had an opportunity to research the costs to be incurred if a home is supplied by city/private water companies. I hope to have this information by the time of the hearing.

Thank you.