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POSITION PAPER ON CHICAGO FIRE CODES

Chicago is a world class city with a world class fire department. Truly, there are no more dedicated firefighters in the world than the CFD. However, when it comes to the City of Chicago Fire codes, the city fails miserably. Why should a first-rate city settle for a third-rate fire protection code? Will another tragedy happen before elected officials within City government do anything to improve fire codes or even bring them up to parity with other cities in the United States? Sadly, politicians tend to bow down to the special interests who contribute to their campaign chests rather than giving first consideration to fire safety.

Many of the buildings constructed before 1974 are not required to have either fire sprinklers or fire alarm detection/voice evacuation systems. It wasn't until the Cook County Admin Building (69 West Washington St.) fire, where six (6) people died in a stairwell, that a change in the High Rise Fire code was enacted to force the building owners of pre-1975 buildings to install sprinklers and undergo a life safety evaluation. That fire occurred on October 17, 2003. The City Council passed a resolution enacting a new High Rise Code mandating the pre-1975 buildings submit a life safety plan to the City and undergo a Life Safety Evaluation (LSE). The Ordinance also mandates that buildings be in compliance with the voice evacuation requirement by January 1, 2012. Unfortunately, the ordinance, in itself, is woefully inadequate.

The City Council recently extended the deadline for building compliance to 2015 due to pressure from building owners.

The Illinois Automatic Fire Alarm Association is made up of fire professionals from all over the State. Our membership consist of consulting engineers, business owners', fire alarm manufacturers/distributors, installation companies, fire inspectors and fire service professionals. We strongly advocate a balanced approach of early warning smoke detection and fire sprinklers for fire safety in the City of Chicago.

We strenuously urge the city to adopt a National Building and Fire Code and rid itself of the outdated and poorly constructed city Fire Code.

We advocate the use of properly designed and maintained automatic system smoke detectors systems in dwelling units, along with voice evacuation signaling systems, so occupants and resident can clearly hear any voice messages with instructions on how to proceed. We strongly agree with the use of tone and voice message evacuation to alert occupants on the floor of incidence and adjacent floors.

There are many painful reminders that the City of Chicago Fire Codes is woefully inadequate. In the past eight years, we have seen the following tragedies in High Rise Buildings:

- Cook County Admin Building, October 17, 2003 – 6 fatalities
- LaSalle Bank Building Fire, December 6, 2004 – 37 injured (22 firefighters)
- 29th & King Drive, January 4, 2011 – 1 injured
- 3450 Lake Shore Drive, January 7, 2011 – 3 injured
- Bank of America Branch (33 N. Dearborn), March 7, 2011 – 2 injuries
- 5000 South Lake Shore Drive, June 18, 2011
- 3100 Lake Shore Drive, January 8, 2012 – 1 fatality, 7 injured

It is time for the City of Chicago including the mayor, and alderman to start thinking of the safety, including well being of their citizens. Contact the Mayor and aldermen to pass a resolution adopting the National Fire Codes. These codes and their enforcement will preserve life safety, peace of mind and benefit you the citizens of Chicago.