



NFPA News

For immediate release

Contact: Lorraine Carli
Public Affairs Office: +1-617-984-7275

Fire service leaders help to stop anti-fire safety legislation

Legislative efforts preserve rights of local communities to create strongest fire safety requirements

April 9, 2009 – Leading fire service advocates in Ohio and Maine have successfully protected the rights of communities in their states to adopt residential fire sprinklers and other important safety provisions.

Advocates in Ohio stripped a state bill of legislative language that would have prohibited a state board and local communities from making important decisions about a wide range of fire safety requirements – including the use of home fire sprinklers. A recent amendment to Ohio House Bill 2 would have taken several steps to prevent the implementation of important, life-saving fire safety requirements.

The Ohio legislative language would have effectively removed significant authority from the Ohio Board of Building Standards – the board that has long formulated, adopted and amended the state’s building and construction code and given that authority to the state’s Residential Construction Advisory Committee. At the same time, the amendment would have increased the influence of the Ohio Home Builders’ Association on appointments to the Residential Construction Advisory Committee. The proposed language also would have prohibited any jurisdiction in the state from adopting any fire safety provision that would be stronger than the statewide code requirements.

“This amendment would have severely limited the ability of the Ohio Board of Building Standards to adopt requirements for home fire sprinklers and other important safety advances in Ohio,” said Assistant Chief Bob Bates, Madison Township Fire Department and the legislative committee chair for the Ohio Fire Chiefs Association. “When the facts about this amendment became clear, the fire service worked quickly to stop it, preserving the ability of the Board of Building Standards and local communities to make decisions based on what is in the best interests of public safety.”

In Maine, several state fire service groups and fire safety advocates recently appeared at a public hearing held by the Business, Research and Economic Development (BRED) Committee of the Maine Legislature to discuss Legislative Document 440 - An Act Regarding Exceptions to the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code. This bill would have exempted residential one- and two-family dwellings from the provisions of the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code. This would have effectively eliminated the residential sprinkler provisions in the state building code and, by default, the ability of local communities in the state to adopt

such provisions on their own. The committee did not move the bill forward at a work session held subsequent to the hearing.

The proposed legislation in Maine and Ohio were just two of the latest in series of legislative attempts across the country to prevent the use of sprinklers and other important safety enhancements. Fire safety advocates across the country have been battling statutory efforts to prohibit residential sprinklers in at least 16 states. An anti-sprinkler proposal was defeated earlier this year in Illinois.

“The fire service has worked hard to protect the rights of communities to utilize the proven life-saving technology of residential sprinklers,” said Jim Shannon, president of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). “Unfortunately, calculated legislative efforts by sprinkler opponents continue to pose a real threat to public safety.”

According to the NFPA, approximately 80 percent of all fires occur in homes; however, when home fire sprinklers are present, the chances of dying in a home fire decrease by about 80 percent. Home fire sprinklers control heat, smoke and flames allowing occupants time to escape and giving firefighters a safer environment. Roughly 90 percent of the time, fires are contained by the operation of just one sprinkler. When sprinklers are not present, the fire can burn for minutes, raging out of control, filling the home with toxic smoke and resulting in far greater losses. A recent NFPA report states that sprinklers reduce the average property loss by 71 percent per fire. All model safety codes now call for the installation of residential sprinklers in new home construction.

Anyone interested in public safety and learning more about home fire sprinklers can visit www.firesprinklerinitiative.org and also visit links to other organizations that support home fire sprinklers.

About the Fire Sprinkler Initiative: Bringing Safety Home

The Fire Sprinkler Initiative, a project of the National Fire Protection Association, is a nationwide effort to encourage the use of home fire sprinklers and the adoption of fire sprinkler requirements for new construction.