



PENNSYLVANIA REPEALS HOME FIRE SPINKLER REQUIREMENT



Advocates for home fire safety are deeply disappointed that the Pennsylvania state legislature has repealed the sprinkler requirement for all one and two family homes. The 2009 International Residential Code (IRC) includes residential fire sprinkler requirements for all newly constructed townhomes and one- and two-family residences. By repealing this mandate, the legislature is actually making Pennsylvania citizens and our fire fighters less safe. Independent experts construct the building codes which are then adopted state by state. Fire sprinklers are part of the International Code.

The Burn Foundation joined fire service, building officials and other burn prevention organizations to form the Pennsylvania Residential Fire Sprinkler Coalition in support of adopting the building code. Residential sprinklers have a long track record of preventing injuries and deaths from fire. Combined with smoke alarms, they are the best method of protecting families from the devastation of home fires.

These life-saving codes have been challenged by the Home Builders Association based on the assumption that the increased cost will cause further decline in the housing market. The Burn Foundation and other sprinkler advocates believe that the true cost is lower than what is being used as an argument and that safety is the most important point. As the public learns more about fire sprinklers, they will realize that they save lives and property.

Here are some basic facts about home sprinklers:

- According to the Fire Protection Research Foundation, the national average cost to install a residential fire sprinkler system in a newly constructed home is \$1.61 per square foot or \$3,656 for a home of 2,271 square feet.
- Sprinklers are activated by heat of 150 to 165 degrees, not smoke. Only a sprinkler head that is close to a fire will activate and in 81% of structure fires, only one or two sprinkler heads are activated.
- The average sprinkler produces 15 to 25 gallons of water per minute, versus 150 to 250 gallons produced by a fire hose.
- Most homes are now built with “lightweight” materials. These are so flammable that firefighters have only four minutes after a fire starts to enter a burning structure, make any rescues, and then retreat before the building could collapse.
- Twenty years ago, before the use of these materials, rescue time was 20 minutes. Today, occupants---especially, children, the elderly and the mobility-impaired---are basically on their own since fire departments (particularly, volunteer departments) cannot respond within three to four minutes.
- Even in older homes, today’s contents are more hazardous due to an increase in chemicals and electronics.
- The average cost of the damage caused by a fire in a home without fire sprinklers is \$45,000 as compared to only \$2,100 in the same home with sprinklers.
- According to a 2005 Harris Interactive Poll, 69% of US homeowners believe that having a fire sprinkler system increases the value of a home.
- Over time, discounts on homeowner’s insurance will pay for the sprinkler systems.

There are many relevant statistics but all of these ignore the human cost of fires. To hear a burn survivor and burn center employee talk about the impact of this bill, [click here](#).