



Governor Signs Groundbreaking Illinois Fire Sprinkler Incentive Bill

Effective immediately, fire protection districts in the state may now offer financial incentive to encourage and reward homeowners who install automatic fire sprinkler systems to protect their homes.

On August 12, 2008, Governor Rod Blagojevich signed HB4687, a bill that establishes the right for fire protection district trustees to award monetary grants to the owners of single-family homes when they install a qualifying fire sprinkler system (installed and maintained in accordance with national standards and certified locally).

The bill was introduced in January 2008 by Rep. Donald L. Moffitt (R-74th).

Representatives Mike Boland (D-71st) and Michael K. Smith (D-91st) sponsored it in the House, and Sen. Michael W. Frerichs (D-52nd) in the Senate. The bill passed the General Assembly on the first attempt.

"The fast track of this legislation speaks to its relevance and value to our state," says Tom Lia, Executive Director of the Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board (NIFSAB). "We applaud Gov. Blagojevich for his recognition

of that and for his prompt action to get the grants up and running."

The Illinois Association of Fire Protection Districts (IAFPD) initiated the idea for the program. It gives the trustees a method to reward homeowner action that helps their districts reduce fire protection costs. The trustees will determine the grant amounts in accordance with the direct impact that sprinkler-protected homes will have on their districts.

"This is a true departure from classic top-down legislation," Lia adds. "With this bill, the districts are in the driver's seat, determining what is best for their constituents. It's an original approach and a strategy that will pay the districts financial and public safety dividends for decades to come."

Despite the fact that 80 percent of fire deaths occur in homes, fire sprinkler system installation in one- and two-family dwellings lacks far behind other occupancies, such as apartment buildings, hotels, hospitals and schools.

National fire safety experts widely agree that fire sprinklers represent the best potential for a dramatic reduction in the thousands of lives lost to fire each year.

"The installation of a residential fire sprinkler system significantly reduces the likelihood of a major fire occurring in a home," says George K. Michehl, executive director with the Illinois Fire Inspectors Association (IFIA). "The IAFPD recognized that and, as a result, recommended the grant program to provide some relief to those who make this life-saving decision.

Lia credits many members of the fire service for their hard work and support including Tom Harnsberger, IAFPD and Carol Fire Protection District, Michael Dillon and Cheri Breneman, IAFPD, Ron Kubicki, Northern Illinois Alliance of Fire Districts, George Michehl, IFIA and Dan Hermes, Illinois Fire Chiefs Association. ■