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ICC passes residential sprinkler resolution

By FireRescue1 Staff

Code changes that would make sprinklers mandatory in new one-family and two-family homes were approved by the International Code Council Sunday.

Ronny Coleman, president of the IRC Fire Sprinkler Coalition, which led the campaign for the resolution to be adopted, called it a "historic moment" in residential fire safety.

"We're now going to move forward at the state and local level to ensure the new code requirement is adopted," he said.

The fire service, home safety advocates and building code officials united to push for a change to the International Residential Code, the model code governing residential construction in 46 states plus the District of Columbia.

Sunday's vote was supported by 73 percent of the voting members in attendance at the final action hearing in Minneapolis — easily surpassing the two-thirds majority required — and mandates fire sprinklers in new single-family homes from the start of 2011.

"Our team worked hard to rally support throughout the United States for a residential fire sprinkler requirement, but our supporters deserve the recognition for showing up en masse in Minneapolis," Coleman said. "They know from experience that sprinklers are the answer to the nation's fire problem."

Proponents had previously come up short in attempts to have a sprinkler resolution passed. At a hearing last year in Rochester, N.Y., a majority of attendees — 56 percent — voted in favor, falling less than 100 votes short of the two-thirds majority needed.

Since that vote, the IRC Fire Sprinkler Coalition has been working to secure more support for its efforts. It now has the backing of more than 100 national, state and local organizations including the IAFC, the IAFF, the NVFC, the National Association of State Fire Marshals and the Home Safety Council.

"We are thrilled not only because this moment has taken decades of demanding work to achieve, but because it provides protection for potential victims of future fires," Meri-K Appy, president of the Home Safety Council, said after the vote.

About 20 percent of all reported fires occur in one- and two-family structures, causing two-thirds of the fire deaths in the United States.

Despite these statistics, builders groups mounted a concerted campaign against the resolution. The

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Builders Association of Minnesota encouraged its members to make sure they attended the hearing at the weekend to try to block the yes vote.

"It is no secret that the National Association of Home Builders and their local affiliates went out of their way to try and stop this," said Billy Goldfeder writing in TheSecretList. "But the fire service and those with some common sense and understanding beyond profit motivation understood what was the right thing to do."

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