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[« Back](#)

## New Ontario Fire Sprinkler Law Not Tough Enough, Local Officials Say

**Systems should be required in all new homes, not just new high-rises, firefighters says**

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Ontario should mandate sprinkler systems for all new homes, a local fire prevention officer said in response to new provincial rules requiring the devices in high-rises.

Greg Nicol said the government should tweak the Ontario Building Code even more by forcing contractors of new houses no matter the size to install sprinkler systems.

"It didn't go far enough, it needs to go further," said the Owen Sound fire department member. "There is significant benefits to installing them in homes."

But an official with the Ontario Home Builders' Association said the decision to install sprinkler systems should be up to the new home's owner, not the government.

The province announced building code changes Tuesday which require all new condominiums and apartments taller than three storeys to be outfitted with sprinkler systems as of spring 2010. Sprinklers are now only required in facilities like nursing homes, jails and hospitals.

The changes bring Ontario in line with other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States.

Nicol said the new rules will have little impact on construction projects in Owen Sound.

A bill that could more directly impact Owen Sound builds passed second reading in the Ontario legislature three weeks ago. The Municipal Residential Sprinkler Act would give municipalities the power to pass bylaws requiring fire sprinklers in all new residential buildings. It still requires a third reading.

Brian Green, Owen Sound's chief building official, said if the bill becomes law he will recommend city council make sprinkler systems mandatory in all new homes. Existing houses would not be affected.

Green, a member of a group advocating for sprinklers in all new homes, said the government announcement is a "step in the right direction."

Sprinkler systems use less than a tenth of the water fire departments spray, he said, "so you have less property damage and less water and no loss of life, so it's bonuses all around."

Owen Sound fire chief Ed Nowak said deaths from house fires would "decrease dramatically" if sprinklers were mandated.

Nicol said installing sprinkler systems during construction is not difficult and would only add a small percentage to a home's overall cost.

Dave Henderson, the Ontario Home Builders' Association's director of industry relations, said fire department officials and sprinkler companies are "oversimplifying" the ease of installing such systems.

He said some homes do not have adequate water pressure for sprinkler systems, especially in rural areas.

"One of the main concerns that we have is that it is really forcing homeowners to pay thousands of dollars for a system that they don't really want or haven't requested," he said.

"We don't debate that fire sprinklers can . . . put out a fire and can save property damage but really, when it comes down to it, we believe that it should be up to the homeowner to make the decision."

Vancouver is seen as an example of fire sprinklers saving lives. The city has required the systems for a decade and has not recorded any accidental fire deaths in a home with a properly functioning sprinkler system. The Ontario Association of Fire

Chiefs has suggested some 90 fire fatalities in the last year could have been prevented by sprinklers.

Peg Paul, spokeswoman for the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition, said an inaccurate belief, perpetuated by movies, that one activated sprinkler turns on all the others stops many people from installing them in their home. Sprinkler only become activated if they're exposed to high temperatures -- usually by being closest to the fire.

"The biggest challenge we have to overcome is that myth," she said.

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