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Alberta eyes tougher fire safety rules for new homes

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EDMONTON - Alberta will change its building and fire codes to make construction sites safer and require more fire-resistant wallboards and sprinklers in many new homes, Municipal Affairs Minister Ray Danyluk announced Friday.

The new safety requirements could add a few thousand dollars to house-building costs for some, but the government said the rules would affect fewer than 20 per cent of new homes, and no existing structures.

The changes have long been advocated by fire chiefs and safety officials, especially after a fire ripped through nearly 100 townhouse buildings in south Edmonton last summer.

The new rules would likely be in place next year, and include:

- . New restrictions on windows at the sides of buildings close to each other, since the openings are passageways for fires;
- . Sprinklers on balconies, attics and patios where sprinkler systems in multi-family buildings exist;
- . Gypsum wallboard and heat detectors in residential garages;
- . Fire-resistant drywall behind vinyl siding on homes 1.2 metres within the property line;
- . More planning and fire-safety oversight to safeguard construction sites, where one-third of multi-property fires start;

Danyluk said he wanted to ensure safety and give fire crews more time to douse blazes before they leap to adjacent buildings.

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