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## Volunteer blazebuster vows to sprinkle safety in homes

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It was the last session of a four-day conference in Las Vegas on fire safety and Murray Pound gambled that maybe, just maybe, it might be one he should attend.

He had no idea when he got up that morning that this last day of the World Safety Conference would present an opportunity to make a difference.

When he walked into the Mandalay Bay seminar, Pound was wearing two hats. The first was as captain and fire prevention officer of the Carstairs volunteer fire department. The second was as that of vice-president of operations for Gold Seal Master Builder.

"That last session was on sprinklers," Pound says. "I'd been brought up in the industry to believe sprinklers are bad in single-detached homes, I heard all the negative stuff about them. But after that two-hour session, I made a 180-degree turn on the matter."

In 120 minutes of listening to what seminar speakers had to say, Pound came away having made the decision that all the homes his Carstairs-based company builds would be designed to include sprinklers.

Pound, who is also a past-chair of the smoke alarm committee for the CHBA-Calgary Region, says he had considered using sprinklers several years ago but didn't have any details.

"The one thing I don't have to worry about is a customer dying from fire-related injuries in one of my homes," he says, adding the involved trades are already undergoing required updating to ensure the sprinkler systems are properly installed.

While all Gold Seal homes will be designed to include sprinklers, the final decision to make them operational will be left up to the home buyer.

There is an added cost that Pound estimates would be approximately \$1.30 to \$1.40 per square foot for two-storey homes, and \$1.25 for bungalows.

There are some insurance companies that will give reduced premiums if homes have sprinklers added, he adds.

A strong housing industry lobby has clearly rejected the mandatory use of sprinkler systems in detached homes.

In 2005, the Canadian Home Builders' Association came out against mandating their use saying: "For the vast majority of Canadians in newer homes, the risk of fire is actually relatively low. And the cost of sprinklers relative to those risks is very high.

"If people want to install this technology, that should be their choice. But imposing the high costs of mandatory sprinklers through legislation cannot be justified on an economic

or risk basis."

At the local level, the Canadian Home Builders' Association-Calgary Region says it's members build to code, and that it is left to individual builders what signature features they establish or which options they choose to offer in their homes.

As far as Pound knows, he is the first builder in the province to introduce sprinklers systems into new construction.

No centres in the province require sprinklers in detached homes, but Vancouver has had a sprinkler bylaw since 1990, and has reported no deaths since then, while property damage has dropped dramatically.

"How can I build without using sprinklers, knowing what I know now? My customers are my neighbours, and the last thing I want to do is a lose a neighbour to fire," says Pound.

And it didn't take long for Pound to put his decision into action. He already has two homes in production right now that will have sprinklers in them.

Gold Seal builds 18 to 20 homes a year in the small Carstairs market at an average price Pound estimates to be around \$410,000.

The company is also an area developer, Pound says, while he will tell those builders of his decision, he has no intention of forcing them to use sprinklers.

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