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CHAPTER 9

NEWSLETTER

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A NEW YEAR FOR RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLERS

As we approach the Christmas Holidays and soon begin a new year, we in the fire service, in particular Fire Marshals, need to begin thinking about a new approach to the residential sprinklers. That being EDUCATION.

A lot of comments have been directed my way regarding legislation to try an overturn SB 1410. Many want to try again to introduce legislation to reverse the actions of the 81st Legislature. The reality of the situation is this, the legislature, in its current political environment, is not about the change our current situation with residential sprinklers. Case in point was the attempt by the Texas Fire Chiefs to introduce a bill allowing local option to enact residential sprinkler ordinances. The bill went no where, even though it gave each citizen the right to vote whether or not they wanted to impose such ordinances on themselves. The bill seemed to be a logical alternative but the legislators did not see it that way.

In the beginning of this article I mentioned EDUCATION as an alternative. We need to begin to seriously talk about the advantages of residential sprinklers at every opportunity. We talk about smoke detectors, encourage their installation, change the batteries regularly, but I will bet that we rarely talk about residential sprinklers. We should be citing statistics about their real benefit to civic organizations. Every fire department at open houses, demonstrations, etc. should have a side by side burn that demonstrates the life saving values of the residential sprinklers. We must begin today dispelling what has become common knowledge about the untruths of sprinklers systems. You know what they are and we all know they are not true, yet we allow these untruths be repeated in our community. Even in the Villages where we have had our residential sprinkler ordinances for over 10 years I still get comments about the untruths. I quickly dispel them and handout material from various sources with each Certificate of Occupancy we issue.

I recently had a conversation with a plumber who has close ties to plumbing board. His comments were we need to switch from trying to change the legislation to marketing. His father was firefighter who died while fighting a fire. He knows that firefighter's lives will be saved if we only installed residential fire sprinklers. But he to knows that all of us have done a poor job of marketing residential sprinklers and this must change.

What can we do? First the TFMA must get on board with marketing residential fire sprinklers by offering a class at each conference on residential sprinklers. We need to preach to the choir as they say. Relay ideas about how to get the truths out there, what the truths are, and how to inspect these systems. They are being installed, albeit few and far between. Provide some financial assistance for side by side burns at regional and statewide conferences. I learned the other day that plumbing inspectors in Houston will be inspecting multi-purpose systems. We need to be at the fore front of making sure the plumbing inspectors are trained in what to look for, otherwise some of those untruths may become a reality.

Secondly every fire department must become proactive about marketing residential fire sprinklers. The better educated our community and legislators become on residential fire sprinklers the better our chances of seeing changes come our way. Follow the examples of Lake Jackson, Pearland and many other fire departments and reach out to your community and talk about residential fire sprinklers. If you are uncomfortable talking about residential sprinklers call me, get on ETFMA, EParade, call or go the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition's website, contact Jeffrey Shapiro, with the IFC. The resources are out there, just reach out to them.

In conclusion I want to say that marketing residential sprinklers will be a daunting task but one which must be done. In the early 70's America Burning cited smoke detectors as a way to save lives. The fire service worked hard over many years to get legislation that would require smoke detectors in every new home or rental even over the objections of some of our current detractors. But we succeeded and reduced the lives lost from 12,000 annually in the 1970's to just over 4,000 annually today. We can do this again.

Have a VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS and a SAFE and HAPPY NEW YEAR.

Rusty Kattner, Director

Texas Fire Marshal's Association