

SNOHOMISH COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT #3

Serving the City of Monroe as

Monroe Fire District # 3

Fire Prevention Division

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1 October 2009

Washington State Building Code Council
Peter DeVries, Council Chair
Post Office Box 42525
Olympia, Washington 98504-2525

Re: Written Testimony in Support of Verbal Testimony delivered September 29, 2009
Opposing Proposed Rule R313

Chairman DeVries and Council Members:

Please accept this letter as written testimony that supports my verbal comments made on September 29.

I am opposed to removing or altering any fire sprinkler provisions in the 2009 IRC model code. Specifically, I am opposed to proposed R102.5 (creating a new Appendix S) and I am also opposed to R313 (moving this section to Appendix S).

I am the Fire Marshal in the City of Monroe and Fire Chief of Snohomish County Fire District # 28.

Council Members, as you consider the value of fire sprinklers, it's important that we do so not with rhetoric, but with facts. I'd like to dispel some of the common myths about fire sprinklers.

- Myth: All fire sprinklers in a system activate at the same time.
- Fact: Individual fire sprinklers are designed to operate when they reach a preset temperature. It is the heat from a fire that causes water to discharge only out of the fire sprinkler in proximity to the fire. This is evident as, 90% of fires are extinguished by only one fire sprinkler.
- Myth: A smoke alarm activation will cause the fire sprinkler to activate.

- Fact: Fire sprinklers are not activated by smoke. Fire sprinklers are activated by heat generated from a fire. These aren't smoke sprinklers.
- Myth: Accidental activation is common.
- Fact: The rate of accidental activation is ~ 1 in 16 million, which is less likely and less severe than home plumbing mishaps.
- Myth: Water damage from fire sprinklers is worse than damage from fire.
- Fact: Fire sprinklers will control a fire with less water and more quickly than fire departments can possibly ever achieve. In fact, extinguishing home fires where fire sprinklers are NOT present utilizes nearly 10 times the amount of water from fire hoses. And fire hose streams are very destructive to property.
- Myth: Fire sprinklers are ugly.
- Fact: Pipes are hidden behind walls and ceilings just like domestic plumbing. And fire sprinklers are recessed and hidden.
- Myth: A code requiring fire sprinklers isn't necessary because people will install them voluntarily.
- Fact: A 200-year fire service history demonstrates that life safety equipment and systems are rarely installed when left to good intentions. We can look to seat belt requirements, air bag requirements, and helmet requirements as illustrations that safety systems often should be imposed because their value is not foreseen by the consumer.
- It's also a fact that the national standard of practice is to have fire sprinklers in newly constructed homes by way of the requirement in all the national codes. Three national codes have contained these requirements since 2003, and the IRC since 2009.
- Further, it's a fact that I voluntarily installed fire sprinklers in my home because I have a career's worth of experience in seeing what happens to people when fire strikes in the home – a home in which they felt comfortable and safe – and a home built to a standard that they depended upon their local government to certify as safe. The installation of fire sprinklers in my home cost me only \$1.53 per square foot, and that included protecting my 3-car garage. My life-saving fire sprinkler system cost me less than the granite countertops in my kitchen. In addition, because I also installed a fire alarm

system to monitor my fire sprinkler system, I received a 25% discount on my home insurance: this is the maximum provided by PEMCO.

I'm glad that those opposed to fire sprinklers recognize that this is an emotional issue. It is an emotion of loss. Please recognize that for the fire service this loss is represented by loss of life, families, and property, whereas opponents claim fire sprinklers cause a loss of profit.

- The fact is that the record of fire in the United States is one of the worst of all industrialized nations in the world. You have an opportunity to change that.
- I urge you to keep residential fire sprinkler requirements in the body of the IRC, and not in the appendix, as that will cause this debate to occur in every city and county throughout our state.

Thank you once again for considering my comments as you deliberate on this and other very important issues.

Yours in public service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Fitzgerald". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "F" and "G".

Michael Fitzgerald
Fire Marshal / Fire Code Official

Cc: File