

March 22, 2016

Mayor Scott Higgins
City Council Members
City of Camas
616 NE 4th Avenue
Camas, WA 98607

Dear Honorable Mayor Higgins and Members of the Camas City Council:

On behalf of future home buyers and citizens of Camas, we urge you to reject a new mandatory fire sprinkler ordinance on all one and two family residential dwelling units. Today, we see increased homelessness in our communities and a shortage of affordable homes. Adding another \$6,000 to \$10,000 to the cost of each home will exacerbate this problem and further prevent middle and low income families from homeownership.

Fire sprinkler supporters argue that the cost to install sprinklers is not substantial. However, a quick review of actual costs indicates otherwise. To back this up, we provide the attached 2015 bids for residential fire sprinkler systems (RFSS).

Four examples of actual sprinkler installation costs illustrate just how expensive they are:

- A 4,090 sq. ft. home in Vancouver - \$9,955.00
- A 3,600 sq. ft. home in Kenmore - \$6,562.00
- A 4,100 sq. ft. home in Kirkland - \$10,700.00
- A 3,106 sq. ft. home in Redmond - \$5,875.00

Not included in these costs is the ongoing maintenance of the systems, additional meters that are required in some jurisdictions, increased costs for installation of larger water lines, and in many cases, a required water tank and a secondary water line between the meter and the home.

Based on research by the Building Industry Association of Washington, the total cost for residential fire sprinklers in each home could total more than \$10,000.

In early 2008, the Washington Legislature requested our State's Building Code Council (SBCC) to form a Fire Sprinkler Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to explore the broad ramifications that surround the installation of residential fire sprinklers statewide. In November 2008, the SBCC approved their report, "Voluntary Private Residential Fire Sprinkler Systems" and forwarded it to the Legislature as a guiding document on why Washington *does not mandate* sprinkler systems for single family homes in the State's building codes.

The report identifies seven barriers and makes the case that until these issues are resolved, RFSS in single-family homes are problematic. These barriers are still valid today and continue to be a significant concern which is why each year, the Washington State Legislature rejects mandatory RFSS in single-family homes.

Barrier 1: Lack of Education

There is a lack of awareness among homeowners about the life-safety benefits of sprinkler systems versus alarm systems, differences between new and existing single-family homes and other key facts that could help the public make better informed decisions about whether or not to voluntarily install sprinklers in their homes.

Barrier 2: Lack of Preferred Design and Installation Details and Guidelines

There is a lack of consistent criteria for installing fire sprinklers that would assist builders, installers, fire personnel, water purveyors and homeowners.

Barrier 3: Cost and Cost Recovery of a Voluntary RFSS Installation

The cost of installing residential fire sprinklers can vary widely, and homeowners often have limited ability to recover these costs, both of which act as barriers to homeowners.

Barrier 4: Costs for Permit and Inspection

Installation of fire sprinklers require plan review and inspections, both of which add costs.

Barrier 5: Increased Cost of Hook-Up Fees in Form of Stand-By System Development Charges

Homeowners may have to increase the meter size serving their property in order to proceed, creating yet another cost burden associated with sprinkler installation.

Barrier 6: Shut-Off Issues

Water purveyors may be exposed to increased liability as a result of a fire at a residence that has a RFSS but is inoperable due to routine maintenance, system damage, or any other issue that would cause water service to a property to be interrupted. (Hard-Wired smoke detectors are required in all new homes because homeowners could not be trusted to change the batteries in their smoke alarms; there is no reason to assume homeowners will do proper maintenance on fire sprinkler systems).

Barrier 7: Water Use Efficiency Rule Credit for Use of Larger Meters

It is recommended that the state Department of Health provide an incremental credit to water purveyors for unaccounted for water, due to the inaccuracy of larger water meters at low flow. Members of the Fire Sprinkler TAG included a comprehensive representation of all industries affected, including builders, fire safety, insurance, water, cities and counties from a general perspective. A great deal of time and effort went into drafting this document, and we believe it raises key questions that continue to be very relevant to this discussion. The barriers identified in the report absolutely must be addressed by any jurisdiction considering mandatory sprinklers or seeking to promote voluntary installation of these systems.

Given the fragile economy and lending environment, adding the cost of sprinklers to a home now or in the next few years will have immediate, immeasurable impacts on the cost of housing (affordability) and homeownership (attainability). Homebuilders cannot financially bear the increased cost to build a house if it cannot be passed on to homebuyers in the form of increased home prices.

A 2014 Fire Fatality Report prepared by the Washington State Patrol - Office of the State Fire Marshal, reports that, "in 2014, there were 45 fire fatalities reported to the Office of the State Fire Marshal by fire agencies across the state of Washington. This represents a 17% decrease compared to the previous year, placing Washington's fire fatality rate at 6.5 per million people.

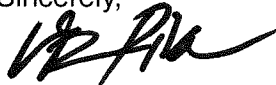
According to the latest available statistics from the United States Fire Administration, the national fire death rate is 9.4 per million people." In fact, fire related fatalities are down for the third consecutive year according to the 2014 report; down 37% from 2011. *The continued decrease in fire related deaths can be attributed to new technology and modern building practices making today's new homes safer.*

According to a 2014 study by the National Association of Home Builders, in Washington State 3,469 potential home buyers are priced out of the market per \$1000 added to the cost of a new home. The same study states that 244 potential home buyers are priced out of the market per \$1000 in additional costs in the city of Spokane alone. This could be one reason the Spokane City Council overwhelmingly passed a resolution stating their opposition to further mandatory fire sprinkler requirements.

We are not talking about homebuyers who are able to choose granite countertops; we are talking about first time homebuyers who are excited to get a new home that features laminate counters, vinyl hard surfaces and builder grade carpet over a 4 pound pad. It is not an issue of builders selling homes; the issue is keeping homes at an affordable price so that most people have an opportunity to purchase a home and experience the benefits of homeownership.

Thank you for your service to the citizens of Camas. We hope you will consider the information provided here and continue to encourage affordable homes and diversity in Camas, today and in the future by rejecting mandatory RFSS in single and two family homes.

Sincerely,



State Rep. Liz Pike
18th District



Tracy Doriot
President, Building Industry Association of Clark County



John Blom
President, Clark County Association of Realtors

AJ Gomez,
President,
Oregon & SW WA Burglar and Fire Alarm Association

