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Leading U.S. fire service organizations urge immediate action to safeguard the American public

The National Fire Sprinkler Association (NFSA), the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), the National Fallen Fire Fighter Foundation (NFFF), International Association Fire Chiefs (IAFC), and the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) are calling on Congress to immediately pass critical legislation to improve fire safety in public housing and older high-rise buildings.

The call follows two tragic fires in the last 5 days that claimed the lives of at least 31 people and injured well over 60. The first fire occurred at a public housing rowhouse in Philadelphia on January 5, 2022, and claimed the lives of twelve people including eight children. The second blaze occurred on January 9th in the Bronx. This second fire is the worst incident in New York City in 30 years and claimed the lives of 19 individuals. Another 63 have been reported injured, some of them critically, and the death toll may increase further in the days ahead.

Linking the two tragedies is the fact that neither building had fire sprinklers. “It’s going on thirty years since Congress passed the Federal Fire Safety Act in 1992, requiring newly built multi-family housing units to have fire sprinklers,” says Shane Ray, President of the National Fire Sprinkler Association. “The problem is that the law did not require fire sprinklers for the existing units.”

“The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimates 570,000 multi-family public housing units were constructed prior to the sprinkler requirement. But fixing this problem is within our reach, with \$53 billion in public housing upgrades, including fire sprinklers, in the Build Back Better bill that passed the House last year. This is another reminder why we need to pass that legislation now.”

President Ray continued “the apartment building in the Bronx was privately owned. However, there is legislation pending in Congress right now called the High-Rise Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act (H.R. 6192/S.3346) that would provide a tax incentive to property owners to install fire sprinklers. Congress needs to move this legislation immediately and not wait for another loss of life before acting.”

Passing the Build Back Better Act and the High-Rise Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act are two of the most meaningful ways that Congress can prevent more tragedies like this and help ensure the physical and mental safety of America’s fire fighters.

Chief Siarnicki of the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF) stated “on top of the unbearable loss for the residents and communities impacted, there is an incredible toll on firefighters too. It’s too hard to get over the sights and smells of responding to tragedies like these.

There is a physical and mental toll in addition to the toxic environment that firefighters are exposed to, which cause cancer at an alarming rate. This risk and loss could easily be mitigated if the law required adequate fire protection in these buildings, especially fire sprinkler systems.”

Fire Chief Kenneth W. Stuebing, President and Chair of the Board of the IAFC concluded “Fire sprinklers have a proven history of saving lives. We urge Congress to prevent future tragedies by funding fire and life safety improvements in public housing.”

Information will continue to come out on these incidents, public policy makers should ensure funding is available to protect these facilities and no building owner should want their investment to exist without adequate fire protection. It should not take a tragedy to make changes that we have known for over a century.

About the National Fire Sprinkler Association (NFSA): NFSA was founded in 1905 and wants to create a more fire safe world, and works to heighten the awareness of the importance of fire sprinkler systems from homes to high-rise and all occupancies in between. The Association is an inclusive organization made up of dedicated and committed members of a progressive life-saving industry. This industry manufactures, designs, supplies, installs, inspects, and services the world’s most effective system in saving lives and property from uncontrolled structural fires.

For more information about fire sprinklers, how they work and access to additional resources and information, visit www.nfsa.org for the latest material, statistics and a dedicated team of fire safety advocates ready to serve all stakeholders in order to fulfill the vision of a safer world.

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