



Fire marshal withdraws sprinkler proposal

AUGUST 02, 2013 9:26 PM • ASSOCIATED PRESS

SPRINGFIELD | The Illinois fire marshal said Friday he's shelving a plan that would have required sprinklers to be added to older high-rise apartment buildings as well as all new-home construction.

"As the brave first responders alongside whom I have served during four decades in fire protection know, Illinois needs 21st century fire safety standards," Fire Marshal Larry Matkaitis said in a statement. "(But) in the course of this process, it's become clear that any proposed state rule needs additional refinement."

The change, which would have been the first update to the state's fire code in 11 years, riled community leaders across Illinois, who said the costly retrofits would drive up rents and bankrupt condo associations.

Matkaitis' proposal would have affected residential buildings constructed before 1975. Buildings with at least four floors and 11 units would have had to install fire alarm systems with "manual pull stations" that'd automatically notify fire departments, according to the Chicago Sun-Times. Meanwhile, automatic sprinkler systems would also be required in new one- and two-family homes as well as in properties that have undergone major renovations involving half of the overall square footage. It'd also impact religious buildings that have seating for more than 300 people as well as any place with "festival seating" areas that were at least 700 square feet.

But after an "unprecedented amount" of feedback, Fire Marshal Larry Matkaitis said Friday that he'd scrap the plan and withdraw it ahead of a public hearing next week in Springfield.

In Chicago, city leaders said the proposal would lead to massive rent hikes and condo special assessments that could cost some property owners as much as \$35,000 per unit. The cost of retrofitting entire apartment buildings was pegged at millions of dollars.

"The rules could have been well-intentioned, but they would have bankrupted many condominium associations," Chicago alderman Bob Fioretti told the Sun-Times, adding that some condo complexes would have to spend \$15 million to comply with

the new standards. "People could not afford it. They wouldn't have been able to afford the assessment and rent increases. They would have had to leave. These rules would have been an economic disaster for Chicago."

And in a letter to Gov. Pat Quinn, state Rep. Sara Feigenholtz said her constituents were in a "panic."

"The proposed regulations will force them to empty their savings accounts or desert their homes to comply with state fire standards," the Chicago Democrat wrote in Wednesday's letter, asking Matkaitis to reconsider.

But supporters of the sprinklers said critics were inflating the cost to install the devices, which they say save lives.

"It will either put the fire out right away, or knock it down to the point when firefighters get there, all they have to do is come out with a hand pump," Matkaitis told the Rockford Register Star. "It minimizes fire damage, smoke damage and lung damage."