

High-Rise Sprinkler Mandates Would Be Blocked Under Proposed State Law



By [Benjamin Woodard](#) on March 27, 2014 6:35am | [@benjamdub](#)

Slideshow



High-rise Fire Sprinklers

EDGEWATER — A handful of Chicago-area state legislators threw their support behind [a newly introduced bill](#) that would greatly limit the power of state Fire Marshal Larry Matkaitis to propose changes to fire codes, leading industry advocates to claim the legislators have a "grudge" against him.

Last year, Matkaitis introduced new fire-safety rules that would have required owners of high-rises throughout Chicago to install costly fire-sprinkler systems.

But after a raucous outcry from condo dwellers, politicians and even the Chicago Fire Department, the fire marshal withdrew his proposal.

Now state legislators are trying to make sure Matkaitis or anyone else would not be able to try again.

State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, who represents residents in Uptown, Lakeview and Lincoln Park, introduced a bill this month that would require any proposed changes to get approval from the state's General Assembly.

"If the fire marshal wants to bring a mandate like this, he's got to do it in the daylight," Feigenholtz said Wednesday night by phone from Springfield.

The bill also would set up a task force made up of legislators, industry experts and members of the general public to review proposed fire safety standards and determine their effect on residents.

"The Fire Marshal's proposal would force exorbitant costs on residents of our community and statewide," state Rep. Kelly Cassidy, who supports Feigenholtz's bill, said in a statement. "Not only would this bill prevent backdoor attempts to force a sprinkler mandate, it would also create a task force to analyze the financial impact of the proposal on residents."

The proposed bill was approved by a House committee Wednesday and would now move to the House floor for a vote, Cassidy said.

Shelly Lulkin, the president of a coalition of condo owners along Sheridan Road in Edgewater, rallied the opposition last summer to the fire marshal's proposal.

"This makes the process more open instead of being a process driven by the fire marshal and his lobbyists — and it'll be a more democratic rule," Lulkin said of the proposed bill.

She said "people are pretty hot" about any type of fire-sprinkler mandate, which could cost millions to implement in older high-rise buildings.

The City of Chicago passed an ordinance in 2004 that required more stringent safety features in high-rises, but did not require sprinklers for buildings built before 1975.

Matkaitis could not be reached for comment.

The Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board in a statement Wednesday blasted politicians for introducing the bill.

The board said the legislators were holding a "grudge" against the fire marshal after last year's kerfuffle. The board also accused Chicago aldermen of misleading constituents when they sent notices to residents encouraging them to support the bill.

"This would be unprecedented legislation that has occurred no where else" in the United States, the statement said.

Feigenholtz denied that was the case.

"I'm highly sensitive to my constituents and I listen very carefully," she said. "This is not a grudge; this is about bringing a very, very serious — potentially costly — issue to the people."

Source: <http://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20140327/rogers-park/high-rise-sprinkler-mandates-would-be-blocked-under-proposed-state-law>