

Fire Sprinkler Mandate Doused After Fire Marshal, Politicians Stand Down



By [Benjamin Woodard](#) on June 2, 2014 3:45pm | [@benjamdub](#)



Illinois State Fire Marshal Larry Matkaitis wanted to mandate all high rises to install fire sprinklers, regardless of age.

CHICAGO — Both the fire marshal and a group of state politicians, who have sparred for months over a costly [fire sprinkler mandate](#) for old high rises, tossed aside their boxing gloves.

In a joint statement, Fire Marshal Larry Matkaitis, State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago) and State Sen. President John Cullerton announced late Friday that they'd come to an agreement.

Matkaitis promised to work with legislators to "pass any new sprinkler laws through the General Assembly," while Feigenholtz agreed to table a proposed bill that would have forced Matkaitis to work with the state legislature, according to the statement.

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.

Then, Feigenholtz introduced the bill.

Now, she said, it's time to "move forward together."

"To pop this [the mandate] the way he did last year was really problematic and stirred the pot," she said of the fire marshals proposal, which would have required as many as 750 buildings in Chicago to install costly fire-sprinkler retrofits.

Even after the fire marshal backed down, Feigenholtz was worried he'd try it again.

"I wanted a more definitive statement," she said. "It was never clear that he wasn't going to attempt this again."

She said more than 8,000 Chicagoans signed a petition supporting her legislation.

But with the legislative session coming to a close Friday, and a vote not yet called for the bill, she accepted an offer.

"I believe there was a lot of support for this, but a lot of parties asked if we could table it and take a statement from the fire marshal," she said. "It was a decision I had to make. ... And I'm hoping the fire marshal will stick to his word."

Fire-sprinkler-industry advocates, however, were "disappointed" with the new development.

Tom Lia, the director of the Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board, said the cost of sprinkler installations in condo buildings had been overstated by as much as two-fold by opponents.

Property owners should decide for themselves whether to install sprinklers, he said.

"I certainly wouldn't want to live in a high rise that's not fire-sprinkler protected because you never know what your neighbor's going to do," he said. "The misinformation needs to stop."