



**Northern Illinois  
Fire Sprinkler  
Advisory Board**

[www.firesprinklerassoc.org](http://www.firesprinklerassoc.org)

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**Chicago High-Rise Fire Fact Sheet**

- January 2001: The Illinois State Fire Marshal's Office adopted NFPA 101, Life Safety Code, 2000 Edition requiring existing high-rise buildings in excess of 75 feet in height, to be equipped with fire sprinkler systems or an engineered life safety system. The code was effective January 2, 2002.
- October 17, 2003: Six people died in the Cook County Administration building fire, 69 W. Washington Street.
  - The Cook County Administration Building Fire Report (prepared by Judge Mikva) concludes that fire sprinklers could have prevented the six deaths and recommended that the City of Chicago adopt a retrofit ordinance.
  - State of Illinois commissioned James Lee Witt Associates to conduct an independent review of the Cook County building fire. Witt report concludes that fire sprinklers could have prevented deaths and recommends that City of Chicago require installation of automatic fire sprinkler systems in all high-rise buildings.
- Ald. Edward Burke (14<sup>th</sup>) proposed a mandate requiring all Chicago high-rise buildings (commercial and residential) be retrofit with fire sprinkler systems. Mayor Richard Daley proposed a mandate requiring fire sprinklers be retrofit in all commercial buildings.
- December 15, 2004: The Chicago City Council passes Mayor Daley's ordinance requiring all commercial buildings be retrofit with fire sprinkler systems. All residential high-rise buildings built prior to 1975 that do not have fire sprinklers must pass a City of Chicago Life-Safety Evaluation. The purpose of the LSE is to review the existing life safety features of the buildings and establish a commitment to repair any deficiencies over a 7-year period (starting 2005 and ending 2012). A licensed architect or professional engineer must perform the evaluation. All LSE's must be complete by Jan. 1, 2006.

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Chicago High Rise Fact Sheet  
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- December 2009: 86% (652) of the 759 buildings that were required to file Life Safety Evaluations did, but 76% (496) of those buildings that filed their plans failed to achieve the standards set forth by the Department of Buildings. Those buildings failed to ensure the safety of those living in non-sprinklered buildings.
- According to an analysis commissioned by the Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board, the City of Chicago's LSE has distinct differences in the levels of significance assigned to various life safety systems compared to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) evaluation. NIFSAB states that a building using the Chicago LSE with a passing score does not necessarily mean that the building is "safe."
  - December 10, 2009: a fire on the thirty-sixth floor of the building at 260 East Chestnut claimed the life of an 84-year-old woman. Prior to the fire, this building passed the City of Chicago LSE.
- December 2011: Chicago City Council approved three-year extension of previous life-safety evaluation.
- January 8, 2012: a fire on the 12th floor of a high rise building at 3130 N. Lake Shore Drive claimed the life of a 32-year-old woman.

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## **High-Rise Fire Sprinkler Facts**

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), most high-rise fire deaths occur in residential apartments and condominiums. By not including residential buildings in the retrofit ordinance, many Chicago residents have been left at risk.

According to NIFSAB, the cost of retrofitting fire sprinklers in a high-rise building will range from \$3.50 to \$5.00 per square foot. While these costs are significant, they must be weighed in comparison to the proven benefits of the protection afforded by a fire sprinkler system.

In most cases the commercial high-rise retrofit ordinance permits equipment already in place such as standpipes and fire pumps to be incorporated into the sprinkler system installation. These cost saving advantages are available to residential buildings as well.

Retrofitting a high-rise building can also result in a fire insurance savings from 20% to 60% for common areas. Condo owners and renters can save between 5% and 20%. These factors need to be a part of the discussion about cost.

Dozens of cities throughout the country require high-rise building be retrofit since the requirement became part of NFPA's Life Safety Code in 1991. There are no reports of the requirement causing economic hardship.

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