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High-Rise Fire Sprinkler Retrofit Costs According to Chicago Contractors And Other Important Facts

The cost to retrofit an existing high-rise building with fire sprinklers averages \$4-8 per square foot, according to completion costs from Chicago-area fire sprinkler contractors on various projects.

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. A partial list of cities with the requirement include Atlanta, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Phoenix, San Diego and San Francisco.

U.S. Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.) and Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) introduced the Fire Sprinkler Incentive Act (FSIA) of 2013, legislation that strengthens tax incentives for building owners to retrofit their buildings. The FSIA reclassifies fire sprinkler retrofits as 15-year depreciable property, allowing owners to receive tax benefits more quickly. Currently, building owners must depreciate fire sprinkler retrofits over a period of 39 years.

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.

Fire sprinklers are individually activated by heat from a fire. When a fire occurs, only the sprinkler closest to the fire will activate preventing deadly toxic smoke and fire from spreading.

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