



**Northern Illinois
Fire Sprinkler
Advisory Board**

www.firesprinklerassoc.org

Contact: Tom Lia, cell (708) 878-8658

History of Chicago High-Rise Fires and Codes

- June 1999: A \$400,000.00 City of Chicago study by the TriData Corporation recommended that Chicago should adopt a national code and that fire sprinklers should be retrofit older high-rise buildings in a 5-10 year phase-in plan.
- 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 (14th) 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.
- March 24, 2013: The residential high-rise building at 2626 N. Lakeview Avenue experiences its third major fire in a six-year span. The first of those fires killed two residents on January 26, 2007, while the second fire occurred on October 25, 2012.
- June 28, 2013: The Office of the State Fire Marshal filed rule changes to update the state fire code, NFPA 101: Life Safety Code, from the 2000 edition to the 2012 edition. The requirements regarding fire sprinkler protection for existing residential and commercial high-rise buildings would remain the same, but would further solidify Chicago's non-compliance with the state code. The proposed rules would allow high-rise building owners twelve years to install fire sprinklers.

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