

Chicago Tribune Response

We applaud the Chicago Tribune for correctly stating the facts about Chicago's high-rise fire safety issue. The City Council did grant an extension for all residential high-rise buildings to retrofit their buildings with fire sprinklers or an engineered life safety system in order to pass a City of Chicago Life Safety Evaluation (LSE) by the end of 2014. The Chicago LSE program falls well short of LSE's in national codes. That was proven when a resident died in a fire in a high-rise building at 260 East Chestnut after that building passed the Chicago LSE. Fire sprinklers are the only life-saving systems.

When it comes to life safety, it's important for high-rise occupants to understand the facts about fire sprinklers. Most older buildings have the infrastructure in place to retrofit the building with fire sprinklers. These include existing water mains, fire pumps and standpipes. Residents and building owners can also experience insurance savings.

The two 38-story McClurg Court buildings are now protected with fire sprinkler systems and prosper with high occupancy rates. All high-rise buildings in Schaumburg have been retrofit with fire sprinklers. On February 25th, a single fire sprinkler extinguished a fire caused by a candle left unattended in a high-rise building in the Village in the Park Apartments in Schaumburg.

Ten years ago after the Station Nightclub fire where 100 people died in less than five minutes because the building was not sprinklered, then Congressman Rahm Emanuel co-sponsored a Bill allowing building owners a tax incentive when they retrofit their buildings. More than 10 years ago, the Chicago Tri-Data Report and the Chicago High-Rise Commission report advocated timetables and TIF support efforts to get this done. Let's all work together now on this very important high-rise fire safety issue by working with facts so people can make real decisions as the time draws down.