



**Date:** January 18, 2007 **Subject:** sprinklers in older building **Circulation:** N/A

## [Www.northjersey.com](http://www.northjersey.com)

### **Fire sprinklers needed for older buildings**

Thursday, January 18, 2007

By **VINCENT FICHERA**

New Jersey just announced new building codes requiring the retrofit of fire sprinkler systems in nursing homes. While this is largely applauded by the fire and safety community, there are still many structures in New Jersey – including high-rises and older buildings – that remain unprotected.

In the early 1980's, New Jersey enacted codes to require all high-rise buildings to have fully-installed fire sprinkler systems, but even those code changes only applied to new buildings. The only way to protect our state's many older high-rise buildings is to create and enforce a retrofit sprinkler building code. Without this necessary code change, many communities in New Jersey with older buildings – and the many at-risk populations that live within – are left unprotected and threatened by fire.

As a priority, the state needs to continue addressing buildings that house populations most at-risk for injury or death from fire. At-risk populations include children, the elderly and the disabled. They also include those that live in dense residential areas – primarily urban cities and surrounding towns – where fire can do more life-threatening damage the faster it spreads.

Those who live and work in high-rise buildings are also at-risk because evacuation, and the fire department's ability to extinguish the fire, is made that much more challenging and life-threatening by the building's construction and height.

Last year, 105 people died from fire – five of them firefighters on active duty. The number of fire fatalities has doubled over the past two years, and the number of fire incidences reported continues to increase every year.

To date, there has never been a multiple loss of life in a building with a fully-installed and well-maintained fire sprinkler system. Fire sprinklers save lives. They are a highly effective and cost-efficient life-saving device.

By design, fire sprinklers use the minimal amount of sprinkler heads and water required to keep a fire from spreading, and in many cases will extinguish it. A person's chances of dying or being injured in a fire are reduced by as much as three-fourths when fire sprinklers are present, and the total amount of property damage is cut by as much as two-thirds.

And not too long ago, the state required fire-sprinkler retrofitting for our state's college dormitories following the deadly Seton Hall fire of 2000. Since then, all colleges in New Jersey have successfully retrofit their dormitories and fraternity and sorority houses. They also have increased efforts significantly to educate students, parents and the public about the dangers of fire.

Fire sprinklers cause minimal property damage, especially when compared to a fire left unchecked, and in fact release only one-tenth of the amount of water released by fire department hoses. They are only activated by heat caused by an intense fire, and not accidentally by smoke from a kitchen stove. Not all fire sprinkler heads activate at once, and in most cases it only takes one or two sprinkler heads to control or extinguish a fire.

New Jersey rapidly made it a priority to protect the lives of its college students following the tragedy at Seton Hall, and recently approved retrofit of fire sprinklers in nursing homes to give desperately needed protection to our state's elderly as well.

The governor and Legislature must not let another six years go by before we do the same for other at-risk





**Date:** January 18, 2007 **Subject:** sprinklers in older building **Circulation:** N/A

## **Www.northjersey.com (cont.)**

populations who remain in need of the same level of protection.

Vincent Fichera is executive director of the New Jersey Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board, composed of business representatives and union members in the fire sprinkler construction and installation industries.

