

PERSPECTIVES

Christie shouldn't kill sprinkler rules

By **DAVID KURASZ**

For the Courier-Post

Gov. Chris Christie has put on hold a pending regulation that will save lives in New Jersey.

When he took office in January, his first action was a 90-day freeze on the majority of new regulations, including the 2009 International Residential Code (IRC) and its requirement that all newly constructed one- and two-family homes and townhomes built after Jan. 1, 2012, contain a residential fire sprinkler system.

The Christie administration needs to finish the regulatory process that is so close to the finish line and adopt this life-saving regulation that has already been vetted over the past two years by numerous code professionals and governmental agencies, including the state Department of Community Affairs. Even the public has voiced its overwhelming support for this regulation during the recent public comment period, sending 1,675 letters in support of the IRC codes and only four letters against.

Fire service professionals — your local firefighters and first responders — fear there are special interests at work, otherwise this regula-

tion would not have been included in the freeze. If this is the case, the residents of New Jersey should not become victims.

By including this regulation in the freeze, it demonstrates that the governor does not realize the vast importance of the residential fire sprinkler requirement and how this life safety regulation will help protect New Jersey residents and its firefighters who risk their lives to save others.

The governor is also overlooking the fact that residential fire sprinklers can take some of the burden off of local jurisdictions and their fire service infrastructure, which should lead to lower property taxes. The residential fire sprinkler requirement was included in the country's primary building code as a result of the growing fire problem in this state and the nation due to new lightweight construction materials and more flammable home contents. These have created an alarming fire safety threat to our citizens, our fire professionals and our first responders.

About 85 percent of all fires occur in the home, a place where people should feel the safest. By the time this regulation tentatively goes into effect on Jan. 1, 2012, 166 innocent New Jersey residents will lose their

lives, 972 civilians and 1,728 firefighters will be injured and over \$223 million of property will be lost in the state as a result of fires, per yearly averages compiled by the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety.

Nationally, the cost to install residential fire sprinklers in a new home is about \$1.61 per-square-foot, which is approximately one percent of the value of the home, according to a FEMA benefit-cost analysis on residential fire sprinklers. This is a small price to pay when it comes to saving lives and homes.

In December, Pennsylvania adopted the 2009 IRC Codes, including the residential fire sprinkler requirement, making the state the first in the nation to adopt the fire sprinkler requirement on a statewide level. New Hampshire and California quickly followed Pennsylvania's lead and adopted the 2009 IRC regulations statewide.

I sincerely hope that the Christie administration will take decisive action in approving the residential fire sprinkler regulation and demonstrate to the residents of New Jersey that the state cares about the safety of its citizens.

The writer is the executive director of the New Jersey Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board in North Brunswick.