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Sprinklers not required by law

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The buildings at 1203 Washington St. partially destroyed in a four-alarm fire yesterday did not have a sprinkler system, and by law they aren't required to.

Only high-rise buildings built or renovated after 1987 are required to have them. But a regulation being considered by the commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs would change that.

The regulation would require all high-rise buildings to have sprinkler systems. A high-rise building is defined as more than 75 feet, which is about six or eight stories, said Vicor Fichera, executive director of the New Jersey Sprinkler Advisory Board, which lobbies on behalf of companies that manufacture and install sprinklers.

The law would not have affected 1203 Washington, which was only five stories, but would affect a large number of Hudson County buildings.

Installing a sprinkler system in an existing building costs between \$6 and \$7.50 per square foot, said Fichera.

DCA Commissioner Joseph V. Doria, the former Bayonne mayor, is "currently collecting further information regarding cost before making further determination," said Chris Donnelly, a Department of Community Affairs spokesman.

Hoboken Acting Fire Chief Richard Blohm endorsed the regulation. "I think it is definitely something that should be pursued," he said. "The fire would not have gotten as far as it did if it had been sprinkled."

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