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Editorial: Christie jams sprinklers

Gov. Christie's red-tape review panel chaired by Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno apparently got it wrong when it wisely gave the go-ahead for a new building-code rule that would require new homes in New Jersey to have fire-sprinkler systems.

Who says? The governor's own people, that's who.

In a stunning turnaround, state Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Lori Grifa has rejected the lifesaving regulation. That means it could be several years at the earliest before there's any hope of implementing a safeguard proven to save lives and prevent property damage.

Grifa issued written notice on Aug. 12 that the added cost of installing residential sprinklers "might impede the recovery of the residential construction sector." Talk about putting a price tag on the lives of homeowners.

Fire-safety experts say sprinklers offer residents a crucial margin of safety to escape fast-burning blazes in newer homes constructed with lightweight materials. Firefighters concerned for their own safety also joined the chorus in support of sprinklers.

Overwhelming public support prompted state officials during the Corzine administration to propose the sprinkler rule. But the Christie administration immediately added the regulation to dozens subjected to review by Guadagno's panel. When it waved sprinklers ahead, Christie officials shunted the proposal over to DCA for yet another review.

Looks like the governor was determined to get his way. Whether he was motivated by the housing industry is for him to say. Regardless, the facts remain the same. The cost of several thousands dollars per home for a sprinkler system remains minimal, given the overall price of a new house. And the safety benefits are incontrovertible.

Pennsylvania's requirement ofr sprinklers in new single-family homes goes into effect next year. New Jerseyans will have to wait.

