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**Draft Testimony Addressing the Assembly Housing and Local
Government Committee and the New Jersey Department of
Community Affairs**

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Good afternoon, my name is Kent Mezaros, Chief Executive Officer of Quick Response Fire Protection located in Manalapan, New Jersey and Mid-Atlantic Regional Director for the National Fire Sprinkler Association. I'd like to speak to you about cost, or cost savings with regards to residential fire sprinkler systems today.

Fire sprinklers are a cost-efficient and an economically sound investment, virtually paying for themselves over a short period of time. According to the Fire Protection Research Foundation, the national average cost to install residential fire sprinklers in a new home is \$1.61 per-square-foot of coverage. While the National average may be \$1.61 per square foot, we realize in New Jersey the costs may be a little higher. Here in New Jersey the cost to install residential fire sprinkler systems in single family homes normally ranges from \$1.75 – \$2.50 per square foot. In my hands I can provide you with an actual quotation dated September 28, 2011 by my own company and contracted shortly after at a cost of \$2.18 per square foot - inclusive of engineering costs. Over the course of the day today you may hear other figures with regards to cost. While others may speculate to what actual costs may

be, I can tell you I as a contractor have performed dozens of single family home installations over the past few years here in New Jersey at or below the installation figures I have provided you with.

A recent study was performed by the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition in conjunction with the Bucks County Fire Marshalls Association for fires that occurred in residences just over the river in Bucks County. There are six municipalities that have had fire sprinkler system ordinances at various times over the past several decades in Bucks County and therefore they were chosen to be used for a comparison. This offers us in New Jersey a realistic example as these are areas that are close to us, are rapidly developing areas, and compare closely in price and home-size to that of which we were building here in New Jersey at the same time.

Overall there were 90 fire deaths that occurred in one and two family dwellings in Bucks County from 1988-2010, which was 88% of all fire deaths during that time frame. Please note - No fire deaths occurred in sprinklered dwellings and five specific fire incidents in sprinklered homes have been documented as saving at least five lives.

During the study time period, the average property loss in sprinklered home fire incidents was \$14,000 with an average of 340 gallons of water used to extinguish the fires. These incidents can be compared to 51 fires in unsprinklered homes in the six studied municipalities from 2005-2010 in which the average loss per fire incident was \$179,896.00 with an average of 5,974 gallons of water needed to extinguish the fires. Hence statistically there was a savings of \$165,000.00 per fire in a sprinklered dwelling as opposed to a non-sprinklered dwelling or a savings of 92%.

Nationally, residential dwelling property loss due to fire exceeds seven-billion dollars on an annual basis. According to the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety there were 16,477 structure fires in New Jersey in 2010. 9,467 of these were residential fires occurring in one-or two family dwellings which amounted to nearly \$51,000,000.00 in property and content losses. Based on both the national averages, as well as the Bucks county study, there would have been a savings in property and content damage of over \$46,000,000.00 if fire sprinklers had been present in these homes. That figure can easily be tripled or quadrupled when considering the millions of gallons of water wasted, hundreds of thousands of hours fire personnel worked, and the needless injuries and deaths that occurred. In New Jersey in 2010 due to fire, seventy-three civilians lost their lives, two-fire fighters lost their lives, 737 fire fighters were reported injured, and hundreds of civilians suffered injuries as well, with many of those injuries being quite severe.

According to the National Association of Home Builders 7,378 permits were filed for single or two family dwellings in 2010 in New Jersey. Median square foot size for single family homes in 2010 was 2200 square feet. If we use my own personal New Jersey adjusted \$2.20 per square foot for fire sprinklers per home the average cost for fire sprinklers per home constructed would have been \$4,840.00. Thus, the total amount of money spent to sprinkler every new home constructed in 2010 in New Jersey would have been under \$36,000,000.00. This is more than \$10,000,000.00 less than the actual property and content loss that the presence of sprinklers would have actually saved! This does not even take into account the massive quantities of time and costs associated with fighting the fires, needless lives lost, injuries and millions of gallons of water wasted. The only group benefitting from the

loss of these properties would be the homebuilders when rebuilding the homes lost due to fire.

The International Code Council has seen the benefits of fire sprinklers as over the years sprinklers have been adopted into more and more building types and structures. Finally, in 2009 fire sprinklers were written into the base building code for all single and two family homes. Part of this was in response to dramatic changes over the years in movement to both lightweight construction and highly flammable contents. Part was due to the remarkable success that fire sprinklers have had in saving both lives and property.

Unfortunately, as we know New Jersey removed the requirement for fire sprinklers when adopting the 2009 IRC during the new administration's regulatory red tape review period citing "Economic" reasons for its removal. The New Jersey Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board was present at every regulatory review meeting, met with the DCA and Division of Fire Safety regularly, and had been told numerous times that there was no opposition to the implementation of fire sprinklers in the 2009 IRC. It would seem that the benefit of very few was given a much higher regard than the protection and well being of the residents of New Jersey. Fire sprinklers save lives, and as detailed above will save the residents of New Jersey money as well.