

IRC TAG Proposal #2

Automatic Fire Sprinkler Systems

Submitted by the Washington Fire Chiefs Association

Issue Paper

The following issues are being submitted to the BFP Committee to encourage moving this proposal forward to the State Building Code Council for further consideration in the code adoption process. The life safety issues noted by the fire service in this proposal warrants a broader debate by both proponents and opponents in an open public forum that meets the intent stated in RCW 19.27.031, "The council shall solicit input from first responders to ensure that firefighter safety issues are addressed during the code adoption process."

- Testimony was provided at the IRC TAG meeting on May 29, 2019 that spoke about the increased risk to firefighters responding to multi-family IRC townhomes built without fire sprinklers and the exponential increase in firefighting resources required for such incidents.
- This proposal to install fire sprinklers in all new built townhome structures included significant cost information inclusive of cost savings to builders that resulted in very little debate amongst the five TAG members present at the meeting. Opponents of fire sprinkler requirements have often cited costs as a primary concern and further conversation on the cost information provided in this proposal would be beneficial to the SBCC.
- This proposal recognizes the national code requirement contained in the IRC since 2009 and retained in 2012, 2015, 2018, and 2021 editions of the IRC. Ten states are currently requiring new built townhomes to install fire sprinklers in recognition of the increased life safety issues resulting from multi-family housing. The basis for Washington omitting the requirement for fire sprinklers in townhomes is an unjustified reduction in life-safety that is not permitted in WAC 51-04-025.
- Currently in Washington State all townhomes built under the IBC, are required to install fire sprinklers. The current Washington State amendment that allows fire sprinklers to be omitted by substituting the required one-hour wall with a two-hour wall is without justification as it increased costs and provides for less safety. The proposal before you will increase the life safety in all townhomes whether built with the IBC or IRC. In addition, the IRC built townhomes achieve a cost savings by installing to the NFPA 13D design instead of the NFPA 13R or NFPA 13.
- The NFPA 13D or P2904 sprinkler installation can be achieved by plumbing contractors that can leverage the efficiencies of multi-purpose piping systems resulting in cost savings. Also, this design allowance increases the number of contracting companies that can be used to install the system.

- Additional cost savings can be achieved by reducing required fire flow for the structure by fifty percent per the International Fire Code.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. Although the IRC TAG voted 2-3 on a motion to approve, there was very little discussion on the technical merits of the proposal. This very close vote and the attendance of only five TAG members to debate this important life safety issue should warrant consideration for moving this proposal to the SBCC.

Todd Short

Fire Service Representative

IRC TAG