

LOCAL

Fire Chiefs hope to see law to require sprinklers in homes

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The International Association of Fire Chiefs has joined forces with the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition and other advocates to push for a federal law to require fire sprinklers in all new homes.

Kings Mountain Fire Chief Frank Burns said the North Carolina Association of Fire Chiefs and North Carolina Firefighters Association are also working on statewide legislation for the same cause. "The North Carolina Building Code Counsel will be voting on this issue March 10 in Raleigh," he said. "It will save lives, not only citizens but firefighters."

He said that firefighters have to treat every fire as if someone were stuck inside and needing rescue. "Unless we are assured that everyone is out, we have to take undue risk to make sure no one is inside," he said.

Although several municipalities have adopted ordinances requiring sprinklers in new homes, no action has yet been taken through the federal government or statewide level. Advocates of HFSC, a non-profit organization, are gaining support across the board from fire officials, insurance agencies, and building owner industry associations, to push for installation of sprinklers in certain new homes being built in 2009.

Chief Burns said NCAFC is focusing on just newer homes being installed with automatic sprinkler systems, "because it is cheaper to install when the building is being built."

According to HFSC's website (homefiresprinkler.org), "Nationally, on average, home fire sprinkler systems add 1% to 1.5% of the total building cost in new construction."

"A sprinkler is like having a firefighter with a charged hose line in every room of your home 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you have small children or older adults, you need a sprinkler system," Burns said. "Sprinklers are good for all buildings because they cost less than some people spend on appliances or entertainment centers. It just make good sense."

According to HFSC's website (homefiresprinkler.org):

■ "Fire sprinklers have no moving parts and act simply as a water plug that releases at a particular temperature."

■ "Home fire sprinklers can contain and may even extinguish a fire in less time than it would take the fire department to arrive on the scene."

■ "Fire sprinklers save lives, reduce property loss and can even help cut homeowner insurance premiums."

■ "Installing both smoke alarms and a fire sprinkler system reduces the risk of death in a home fire by 82%, relative to having neither."

■ "Only the sprinkler closest to the fire will activate, spraying water directly on the fire. Ninety percent of fires are contained by the operation of just one sprinkler."

■ "Home fire sprinklers use only a fraction of the water used by fire department hoses (which, on average, use more than 8 1/2 times the water that sprinklers do to contain a fire)."

■ "According to the Scottsdale Report, a 15-year study of fire sprinkler effectiveness, a fire sprinkler uses, on average, 341 gallons of water to control a fire. Firefighters, on average, use 2,935. Reduced water damage is a major source of savings for homeowners."

Over the past 12 years, around 250 Habitat for Humanity homes across NC have been built with an automatic fire sprinkler system.

According to the National Fire Protection Agency, fires kill more people annually in the United States than all natural disasters combined, more than 4,000 people every year. Eighty percent of those deaths happen at home.

A current NC House Bill 260 would require automatic sprinkler systems in residential buildings of more than two stories and containing more than 16 dwelling units built on or after the effective date of the rule or amendment. It has not yet been passed or signed into law. For more information on home fire sprinklers, call 1-888-635-7222 or visit homefiresprinkler.org

KMFD hosts car seat checks

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The Kings Mountain Fire Department hosted a free car seat safety check at station two on Shelby Road Thursday afternoon.

Safe Kids of Cleveland County (SKCC) gave the checks. Several new car seats were on-hand at the station in case SKCC ran across any seats that needed to be replaced. Child Passenger Safety Technician Judy Hawkins, with SKCC, said that they look for seats that are broken, too old (over six years old), or have been in a crash. Those seats, which pose a safety risk, are often replaced by the new seats they have on-hand.

During every check, technicians look to make sure that seats and children are secured properly, that drivers are aware of how to properly secure child passengers and that serial numbers and manufacturing information on seats are not flagged by recall lists. In the case that seats have been recalled, technicians are able to tell drivers what they need to do to make sure their seats are secure in the future.

"We let parents know of any issues and show them how to install seats properly," Watkins said.

Also on hand at Thursday's safety check was Tom Crider, of Transit Authority of Cleveland County, Child Passenger Safety Technicians Joan Mabry and Jeff Oliver, and Intern Heather Roka, a student of Gardner-Webb University, majoring in Health and Wellness.

Crider mentioned how seat belts should not be directly underneath a passenger's neck, but should instead crosscut a person's chest. If worn properly in an accident, he said, "most people are going to survive even front end collisions."

Other safety tips include:

■ Children should always ride in the back seat and never in front of an air bag.

■ Children under age one and less than 40 pounds should always ride in a car seat made for infants of the appropriate size and age.

■ Children weighing between 0-40 pounds should always sit in a car seat facing the back of the car.

■ Children weighing between 0-40 pounds should have straps that are snug and others can't



EMILY WEAVER/HERALD

Child Passenger Safety Technician Judy Hawkins takes note of mother Amy Blalock, now safely securing her 18-month-old daughter Lillian Blalock into her car seat as Sarah Blalock, 11, looks on.

pinch the buckled strap.

■ Children weighing between 0-40 pounds should have a car seat buckled tightly in the car, where it doesn't move more than an inch when pulled.

■ Children under four feet, nine inches tall, weighing more than 40 pounds should always ride in a booster seat, using a seat belt with lap and shoulder straps.

■ Lap belts should sit low on hips and not stomach.

■ Shoulder belts should be on shoulder, not on neck, under arm or behind back.

■ Seat belts should be snug, flat and comfortable on child.

■ Children over four feet, nine inches tall, weighing over 80 pounds should always use a seat belt with lap and shoulder straps.

■ Children over four feet, nine inches tall, weighing over 80 pounds should have backs firmly against the seat back, knees bending at the front edge of the seat and can comfortably

sit this way for the entire ride.

The Kings Mountain Police Department offers free safety car seat checks by appointment. To schedule a check, call 704-734-0444.

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