

WISCONSIN FIRE OFFICIALS WARN OF MORE DEADLY FIRES AND ELECTROCUTIONS IF STATE SAFETY OFFICIALS AND HOME BUILDERS HALT EXPANSION OF FIRE SAFETY DEVICES

Administration's abrupt decision last week to reverse proposed reduction in sprinkler requirements shows they know the danger of fires to Wisconsin families, but firefighters warn failure to expand requirements for Arc Fault Circuit Interrupter (AFCI) and Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) devices will put more lives at risk

MADISON – Fire chiefs, firefighters, fire and electrical inspectors and others today appeared at the State Capitol to warn state leaders of the consequences Wisconsin will suffer by removing the nationally required expansion of fire prevention devices already in use and protecting Wisconsin residents in newly built homes.

The state Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) recently dropped a recommendation to roll back requirements for fire sprinklers in apartment buildings, but agency officials have not acted on an advisory committee's recommendation to expand the use of arc-fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs) and ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs), which have the potential to stop deadly electrical fires before they start and prevent shocks and electrocution. The 2017 National Electrical Code requires expansion of these devices into additional areas throughout homes around the country.

"Homes being built in Wisconsin today are bigger than ever, and as firefighters, we know that bigger homes mean bigger, hotter, faster-burning and more devastating home fires," said Wauwatosa Fire Chief Robert Ugaste, president of the Wisconsin State Firefighters Association. "We need every advantage we can get to protect people – and that is what AFCIs and GFCIs provide. These fire safety devices need to be in our state electrical code and fully expanded to 2017 standards. If they're not, more residents and firefighters will be injured or die in these fires. We cannot let this happen, so we are appealing to the public to contact Gov. Scott Walker and their state legislators and ask them to stop these proposals to benefit home builders now, before we put families and firefighters at even more risk from these fires."

According to Bill Neitzel, chair of the state's Electrical Advisory Committee that recommended the AFCI, GFCI safety device expansion, Wisconsin is already lagging behind the rest of the country when it comes to [National Electrical Code \(NEC\) safety requirements](#). Home builders have opposed the expanding AFCI/GFCI use citing cost. The added cost to a new home to expand AFCIs and GFCIs is less than \$400 for a 2,100 sq. foot home priced around \$200,000. Home builders have claimed that added cost, roughly \$2 a month on a 30 year mortgage, will turn some people off to buying a home altogether. Opponents like Neitzel are highly skeptical that homebuyers would rather spend their money on high-end cabinetry and granite countertops

than proven safety devices to protect their children and grandchildren from potential electrical fires and dangerous electrical shocks.

“I wonder what the insurance industry will think upon learning Wisconsin is no longer interested in protecting citizens with nationally recognized electrical safety standards,” said Neitzel. “The home builders are putting their profit above public safety and that’s concerning to a lot of people. There’s no reason why we shouldn’t be leading the nation in fire and electrical safety, but if the administration’s proposed changes move forward, the home builders will get their way, keeping Wisconsin stuck at 2008 and 2011 NEC requirements. That means Wisconsin will potentially be a full nine years behind the rest of the country and current 2017 NEC standards. I just can’t believe that Gov. Walker would allow the home builders to build new homes that will knowingly put people at greater risk from dangerous electrical fires and electrocution.”

A recent National Fire Protection Association report that utilized Wisconsin Fire Incident Reporting System data, shows an estimated 1,070 electrical fires occurred in Wisconsin between 2010 and 2014 that would have been prevented had the homes/buildings contained AFCIs. AFCIs detect dangerous arcing in wiring and damaged extension cords and shut down power to the system to prevent a fire. The AFCIs would have also prevented 13 deaths, 26 injuries and \$39.8 million in property damage during that time.

“Clearly the AFCI and GFCI devices work and are respected by those in the fire services,” said Larry Plumer, president of the Wisconsin State Firefighters Association. “We need the Governor’s leadership on this to stop this bad idea by the home builders and his department. We need him to protect the people of Wisconsin as he has done before on this issue. This would send a strong signal that new homes in our state need to have the most up-to-date, proven fire safety technology available. We are urging everyone to contact the Governor and their legislators and let them know we need electrical safety codes expanded that protect us, not special interest proposals that would expose firefighters and families to even greater risk from deadly fires and electrocution.”

Nearly 200 firefighters, fire chiefs, fire inspectors, electrical inspectors and burn survivors recently appeared at public hearings around the state to voice their opposition to the Safety Department’s proposals to halt expansion of the safety devices.

The public is encouraged to voice its opposition to the proposals by contacting Governor Walker at 608-266-1212, via email <https://walker.wi.gov/contact-us> or on Twitter [@GovWalker](https://twitter.com/GovWalker). Contacts for local legislators can be found via <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/>.

Among the organizations opposing the DSPS proposals are the Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association, Wisconsin State Firefighters Association, Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors, Wisconsin State Fire Inspectors Association and the International Association of Electrical Inspectors – Wisconsin Chapter.