

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
March 7, 2017

CONTACT: Chief Rob Ugaste 414-471-8490  
WI State Fire Chiefs Assoc.

## **WISCONSIN FIREFIGHTERS AND OTHERS CALL ON GOVERNOR TO STEP IN TO PROTECT STATE FAMILIES FROM FUTURE ELECTRICAL FIRES IN NEW HOME BUILDING**

*Current proposals would “turn back the clock” on national electrical code standards, putting Wisconsin nearly a decade behind other states and making new homes less safe from electrical fires*

**WAUWATOSA** – Fire chiefs, firefighters, fire inspectors and electrical inspectors from around the state today gathered at the Wauwatosa Fire Department near Milwaukee to remember those who have been injured or died in electrical fires and to call on Gov. Scott Walker to help stop state agency proposals that would see new Wisconsin homes built without the up-to-date safety standards required in other states.

The group indicated the proposals by the state Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) ignore an earlier recommendation by the department’s own Electrical Advisory Committee to expand the use of arc-fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs), ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) and related outlet receptacles, which stop deadly electrical fires before they start and prevent shocks and electrocution. The [2017 National Electrical Code \(NEC\)](#) requires use of these devices be expanded into additional areas in U.S. homes.

“It is sad to think that Wisconsin’s own safety department, during a week that most Americans will be setting their clocks forward, is actually proposing to significantly roll back the clock on fire prevention and safety protection standards,” said Wauwatosa Fire Chief Robert Ugaste, president of the Wisconsin State Fire Chiefs Association. “AFCI and GFCI breakers and outlet receptacles, are proven safety devices that need to be in our state electrical code, and their use should be fully expanded to 2017 standards.”

Wisconsin currently builds homes under the 2011 NEC requirements, which requires the fire protection devices in bedrooms and other areas. Updated to current standards would expand the requirement to laundry and kitchen areas, a move home builders oppose because they say the devices are too expensive.

“A few years ago, there was a similar push to put home builder’s profit above the lives of families and firefighters. We are thankful that Gov. Walker stepped in at that time to ensure residents were protected, and we need him to do that again,” said Milwaukee Fire Chief Mark Rohlfing. “We cannot lower the bar on electrical and fire safety when it comes to new home building in Wisconsin. Lives will be put at risk, and our citizens deserve better.”

According to Bill Neitzel, chair of the Electrical Advisory Committee that recommended the AFCI, GFCI safety device breaker and outlet receptacle expansion, the home builders' cost argument against the devices doesn't stand up. The added cost to expand AFCI and GFCI use to 2017 requirements is less than \$400 for a 2,100-square-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.

"If the home builders get their way to make more profit, our state electrical standards will be stuck at 2011 or older levels. I don't think people spending money to build a new home in Wisconsin will want to know it was built to standards nearly a decade old and way behind the rest of the country," Neitzel said. "We're hoping Gov. Walker realizes this is an opportunity here to keep Wisconsinites safe for many years to come. We're appealing to him to do the right thing for the many families he serves, who will be building homes in a growing Wisconsin economy."

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.

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 DSPS proposals to halt expansion of the safety devices.

The Wauwatosa event included a bell ringing to honor Wisconsin civilians and firefighters who have been injured and/or died over the years due to electrical fires. Fire services personnel also held up photos of electrical fires from each of the municipalities their departments serve around Wisconsin.

The public is encouraged to voice its opposition to the proposals by contacting Gov. 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.