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President's message: RIBA against sprinklers in new homes

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There's a quaint old saying that's very apt for the times we live in: "The squeaky wheel gets the grease." We've all heard this saying. It's often mentioned when we talk about some concession lawmakers made to the interest group that yelled the loudest on this or that issue.

It's a saying that's all too true, especially in certain matters vital to the shelter industry.

Take the issue of residential sprinkler systems, for example. The movement to require these systems in new home construction across the country has finally come to a head: The requirement is present in the 2009 revisions to the International Residential Code (IRC). As a result, we in Rhode Island now have to deal with it. Our Building Code Standards Committee either has to accept it, reject it, defer it, or modify it in some way for use in Rhode Island's code.

Why don't they just reject it? Because we in the shelter industry are not the "squeaky wheel".

Some years ago, as the story goes, a brilliant young marketing person at a company that manufactured fire sprinkler systems got the idea to rally local fire marshals to the cause of residential sprinklers. Since then, the movement has, so to speak, spread like wildfire.

As part of the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA's) aggressive campaign to promote adoption of the residential fire sprinkler initiative for one- and two-family homes, fire officials from around the country turned up in droves at the International Code Council (ICC) meeting in Minneapolis on the day of the vote. They made known their presence and their support for the residential sprinkler proposal.

They became the squeaky wheel.

So even though local building code officials largely opposed the sprinkler requirements, citing technical concerns and their added, unjustified expense, the proposal prevailed and was added to the IRC.

You can be sure that our local fire officials will turn out, in great numbers and in uniform, at the public hearing on the residential sprinkler issue when it takes place at One Capitol Hill in Providence in late February .

Where will you be on that day?

As a matter of fact, how much more will you put up with? Call your state lawmakers and tell them to make these expensive, totally unnecessary, union-driven regulations stop!

For more information on this or any other legislative issue facing the shelter industry in 2010, watch the legislative summary in the library section of www.ribuilders.org or contact RIBA executive director Roger Warren at (401) 438-7400 or e-mail rwarren@ribuilders.org.

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