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## Residential sprinklers in RI state code agenda

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For Rhode Island's home builders, changes to the 2009 International Residential Code (IRC) are dominated by the new requirement for residential fire sprinkler systems in new construction.

The Rhode Island Building Code Standards Committee (BCSC) is still deciding which parts of the code to adopt or amend for state use, and a hearing on the residential sprinkler issue is slated for later this month - at One Capitol Hill.

Robert DeBlois Jr., a member of both the Rhode Island Builders Association and the BCSC, led a discussion on the residential sprinkler issue during the RIBA board of directors meeting on January 5th.

Several points came up during the discussion:

- \* Newer codes, especially electrical, make newer homes less susceptible to fire, and less likely to justify the expense of a sprinkler system.
- \* IRC writers probably assume that plumbers in any given state can install a sprinkler system. That's not the case in Rhode Island, where licensed pipefitters would have to do the job, not plumbers. This introduces another trade, another expense, and probably another union.
- \* Homes in areas of the state without municipal water supplies could lack the water pressure, or even the water volume, to operate a sprinkler system. This might require storage tanks, pumps and periodic inspections, adding further costs.

While the IRC requires fire sprinklers in new townhouses upon code adoption, and in new one- and two-family dwellings as of January 1, 2011, a subcommittee of the BCSC has suggested that both be deferred in Rhode Island until January 1, 2014.

Equally significant are the proposed "energy efficiency" revisions, which would involve essentially sealing a home's "energy envelope." Part of this would be a general requirement for R-20 insulation in exterior walls, creating a fear among many builders that 2x6 studding might be required.

DeBlois and RIBA green building committee chairman Daniel Paquette assured directors that there are ways to fulfill the "energy envelope" requirement while remaining with 2x4 studding.

Directors were told that the state has received federal stimulus money that requires adoption of the code's energy section.

Some directors noted that sealing homes according to this code, without proper ventilation, will be unhealthy, contributing, among other things, to mold growth and allergies.

The point was made that builders, not regulators, will be held legally responsible when such problems occur.

In the matter of flooring, recent deck collapses, especially in Rhode Island, have prompted a new requirement for a direct connection between deck and interior floor joists, requiring special hardware.

Other proposed code changes are largely matters of language clarification, DeBlois said.  
For copies of the IRC changes, contact RIBA executive director Roger Warren at (401) 438-7400.

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