

18 June 2010

Sprinklers in all newly built homes - the position in Wales

Summary

The Forum will hear from Ann Jones AM, Welsh Assembly Member for Vale of Clwyd, on legislation passed by the National Assembly for Wales that makes the installation of fire sprinkler systems mandatory in all new build homes.

Recommendations

Members are asked:

- To receive and comment on the presentation by Ann Jones AM;
- To consider whether the LGA Group would wish to lend its support to the Private Members' Bill tabled on 27 May 2010 by Lord Harrison (as detailed in paragraphs 13 & 14);

Action

Officers to take forward any agreed actions.

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Background

1. The current proposal in Wales follows a successful campaign led by Mrs Ann Jones AM, which has resulted in the Welsh Assembly Government making the installation of fire sprinkler systems mandatory in all new schools.
2. The background of the legislation, which is only applicable to Wales, is as follows:
 - In July 2007, Mrs Jones AM won a backbench legislative ballot at the National Assembly for Wales allowing her to introduce a Legislative Competence Order (LCO), which introduced a proposal to make the installation of fire sprinkler systems mandatory in all new home build.
 - After successfully passing scrutiny stages in both Wales and Westminster, the LCO was completed with Royal Approval on 12 April 2010.
 - With the relevant powers now devolved to Wales, Mrs Jones is now able to introduce an Assembly 'Measure' to enforce the objectives laid out in the LCO i.e the installation of sprinkler systems. It is hoped that the Measure stage can be completed before the close of the Assembly's current term in May 2011.
3. This proposal also followed the creation of the One Wales Government which – in 2007 - committed to providing 6,500 new homes in Wales. The LCO looks to ensure that new homes in Wales are safer and greener in the long term.
4. The legislation enjoys widespread support from, amongst others, Welsh Assembly Government, Welsh Affairs Select Committee, Wales' Three Fire & Rescue Services, the FBU, Chief Fire Officer's Association, National Fire Sprinkler Network and the British Automatic Fire Sprinkler Association. Furthermore, the LCO has also received cross party support in Wales.

Evidence

5. There is considerable evidence supporting the installation of fire sprinkler systems, and there has been a growing recognition of their use as a means to contributing to life safety which is now recognised in current UK guidance to the Building Regulations¹.

¹ Department for Communities and Local Government, Approved Document B (Fire safety) – Volume 1: Dwelling houses (2006 Edition)
<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/england/professionals/en/1115314683674.html>

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6. A report² published in the USA in 2007 by the National Fire Protection Association concluded that in properties where sprinklers are fitted:
 - The death rate per fire is lower by at least 57%;
 - For most property uses, damage per fire is lower by one-third to two-thirds;
 - 89% of reported structure fires have flame damage confined to the room of origin compared to 57% when no automatic extinguishing system is present.
7. There are no cases on record where multiple fire deaths have occurred in buildings with working sprinkler systems. The evidence also shows that no lives have been lost in the UK due to fire in buildings fitted with domestic sprinkler systems.

Cost

8. Recent estimates from the Fire & Rescue Service indicate that the cost of installing a fire sprinkler system is just under £1,500. An accepted estimate is that installation would amount to approximately 1% to 2% of the full construction cost of a new dwelling. This compares to an average cost of a domestic fire estimated at £24,900, of which approximately £14,600 is accounted for by the economic cost of injuries and fatalities and £7,300 is due to property damage.
9. It is estimated that the average cost borne by the service is around £3,444.00, for a non fatal domestic fire. If a sprinkler has been in activation to quell the fire this cost drops to around £1,500.

LGA action to date

12. The use of sprinklers has been an issue for the LGA for a number of years. In 2003, a Sprinkler project group was formed to promote the use of sprinklers in domestic properties and schools. To date the LGA has produced several publications on this subject, including toolkits for councils, domestic properties and schools. Most recently we published:
 - *Safeguarding your communities from fire; The benefits of automatic water suppression systems, a quick guide for councillors*, July 2008 (**attached**)
 - *Fire Sprinklers and schools Report*, July 2008 - LGA and BAFSA (available to view via: <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/814297>)
13. On 27 May 2010, Lord Harrison tabled a Private Members' Bill entitled "Building Regulations (Review) Bill (HL). The Bill will be debated shortly in the House of Lords. If passed into law, the Act would oblige the Secretary of State to conduct

² National Fire Protection Association, U.S. experience with sprinklers and other automatic fire extinguishing equipment, June 2007
<http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files//PDF/OSsprinklers.pdf>

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a review of and impact assessment within 12 months of the passing of the Act for the amendment of the Building Regulations 2000 with regard to the installation of automatic fire suppression systems.

Financial Implications

14. A full cost assessment would be part of any future legislation. However, it is clear that the benefits that automatic water suppression systems (AWSS), including sprinklers, can bring often far outweigh the initial outlay cost. Members are therefore invited to consider whether the LGA Group would wish to lend its support to the Private Members' Bill as detailed above.

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