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Code changes will save lives

From now until Nov. 7, the public will have a voice in helping the state decide whether or not to adopt a new building code that will require fire sprinklers to be installed in all new homes beginning in 2012. Home builders oppose the new code, claiming it's too costly to home buyers, even as they encourage home buyers to invest in more costly aesthetic upgrades, such as granite countertops.

The addition of residential fire sprinklers to the 2009 International Residential Code is the result of a growing fire problem in New Jersey and the U.S., due to new lightweight construction and more flammable home contents that have created an alarming fire safety threat to our citizens, our fire professionals and our first responders.

Last year alone, 83 people died in New Jersey from fires, and approximately 1,400 people were injured. Almost 90 percent of all fire fatalities occur in the home - the

place where we feel the safest.

Nationally, the cost to install automatic fire sprinklers in a new home is about \$1.61 per square foot, which is approximately 1 percent of the value of the home. When the cost is spread over a 30-year mortgage, it comes down to less than the price of a cup of coffee per week. This is a small price to pay when it comes to saving lives.

The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs and FEMA's U.S. Fire Administration support the required installation of residential fire sprinklers in new construction, as do fire service professionals across the country. Fire sprinklers save lives and property.

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