

## Don't let policy overlook fire safety

By DAVID KURASZ

**G**ov. Chris Christie has put on hold a pending regulation that will save lives of New Jersey residents.

When he took office in January, his first action was a 90-day freeze on the majority of new regulations, including the 2009 International Residential Code (IRC) and its requirement that all newly constructed one- and two-family homes and townhomes built after January 1, 2012, contain a residential fire-sprinkler system.

The Christie administration needs to finish the regulatory process that is so close to the finish line and adopt this life-safety regulation, which already has been vetted by numerous code professionals and governmental agencies, including the Department of Community Affairs over the past two years. Even the public has voiced its overwhelming support for this regulation during the recent public comment period, sending 1,675 letters in support of the IRC codes and only four letters against.

Fire service professionals — your local firefighters and first responders — fear there are special interests at work, otherwise this regulation would not have been included in the freeze. If this is the case,

the residents of New Jersey should not become victims.

By including this regulation in the freeze, it demonstrates that the governor does not realize the vast importance of the residential fire-sprinkler requirement and how this life-safety regulation will help protect New Jersey residents and its firefighters who risk their lives to save others. The governor also is overlooking the fact that residential fire sprinklers can take some of the burden off local jurisdictions and their fire service infrastructure, which should lead to lower property taxes.

The residential fire sprinkler requirement was included in the country's primary building code as a result of the growing fire problem in this state and the U.S., due to new "light-weight construction" materials and more flammable home contents. These have created an alarming fire safety threat to our citizens, our fire professionals and our first responders. About 85 percent of all fires occur in the home, a place where people should feel the safest.

By the time this regulation tentatively goes into effect on January 1, 2012, 166 innocent New Jersey residents will lose their lives, 972 civilians and 1,728 firefighters will be in-

jured, and more than \$223 million worth of property will be lost in the state as a result of fires, per yearly averages compiled by the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety.

Nationally, the cost to install residential fire sprinklers in a new home is about \$1.61 per square foot, which is approximately 1 percent of the value of the home, according to a Federal Emergency Management Agency benefit-cost analysis on residential fire sprinklers. This is a small price to pay when it comes to saving lives and homes.

In December, Pennsylvania adopted the 2009 IRC Codes, including the residential fire-sprinkler requirement, making the state the first in the nation to adopt the fire-sprinkler requirement on a state-wide level. New Hampshire and California quickly followed Pennsylvania's lead and adopted the 2009 IRC regulations statewide.

I sincerely hope the Christie administration will take decisive action in approving the residential fire-sprinkler regulation and demonstrate to the residents of New Jersey that the state cares about the safety of its citizens.

*David Kurasz is executive director of the New Jersey Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board.*