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## **NJ Fire Professionals Gather to Pledge Support for Proposed High-rise Fire Sprinkler Retrofit Regulations**

### **Proposed Regulations Set to Expire in 12 Days if Not Adopted By State**

**MAHWAH, NJ (Sept 5, 2008)** – New Jersey fire officials, fire chiefs, firefighters and friends of the fire community held a press conference today at the Bergen County Law & Public Safety Institute urging the State Department of Community Affairs to adopt regulations making it mandatory for all high-rises in NJ without complete fire sprinkler coverage to be retrofit and fully-protected. The regulations are part of a list of rule amendments submitted by the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to update the state's current State Fire Protection Codes and provide adequate fire sprinkler coverage for all high-rise buildings built before 1988. The regulations were proposed in September of 2007 and the DCA has until September 17, 2008 to adopt these regulations before they expire.

“Back in 1988, the State recognized the dangers that fires in high-rise buildings pose when it required the installation of comprehensive fire sprinklers in all new construction. The tragic fire at Seton Hall in 2000 further underscored the desperate need for comprehensive sprinkler protection in all high rise buildings,” acknowledged Stan Sickels, Vice President of the New Jersey Fire Protection & Prevention Association. “There is an opportunity now to bridge the significant gap that currently exists in public safety and extend the same level of fire protection to those currently at-risk of death and injury in high-rises built before 1988. That includes tenants of high-rise buildings and the fire service professionals who put their lives on the line to protect them when fire strikes.”

According to research by the National Fire Protection Association, high-rise fires cause more deaths and injuries per fire than in any other building type. Since 1988, there have been 30 fire fatalities in New Jersey related to high-rise fires.

According to research gathered by the Department late last year, 470 New Jersey high-rise buildings currently lack adequate fire sprinkler protection. A significant

percentage of those buildings are located in the state's most densely populated cities and urban areas.

"Without comprehensive fire sprinkler protection, there is a much greater risk for injury or death and catastrophic property loss," says Russ Fleming, Executive Vice President of the National Fire Sprinkler Association, who was on hand at the press conference.

"There has never been a multiple death in a building with a fully-installed and well maintained fire sprinkler system. New Jersey's Department of Community Affairs has a tremendous opportunity to act now and protect its most vulnerable residents before a catastrophic event occurs in one of these buildings."

Fire officials are urging the state to take action before tragedy strikes, versus waiting till after a tragedy to act. "After multiple deaths and injuries occurred in a high-rise Seton Hall dormitory, the state was quick to address the dormitory issue, but not the high-rise issue," noted Larry Rauch, Bergen County Fire Chief. "Similar fires across the river in New York have already claimed lives in the past year, while those in this state have caused multiple injuries of citizens and firefighters. We are beseeching the state to act now to prevent a potentially tragic fire, versus waiting for a tragic fire to happen, when it's already too late."

Local fire officials also urged residents of older high-rise buildings to take action and make sure their homes are properly protected. Residents should contact their building managers if they feel their safety is at-risk, and contact their local fire departments for tips on how to protect their families in high-rise situations.

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