

South East Regional Select Committee

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Date

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Dear Sir/Madam

South East Regional Committee Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the South East Regional Select Committee on Housing in the South East. Below is the submission from the South East Fire & Rescue Services' Regional Management Board. It was put together by Mick Crennell from Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service. Please could you direct any queries to him. His contact details are 023 8062 6853 or mick.crennell@hantsfire.gov.uk.

1. You may be aware that the Welsh Assembly Government looks set to be given powers which will require builders to install sprinkler systems in all new homes in Wales. The decision by the Welsh Affairs Select Committee to support the Assembly being enabled to introduce legislation will make the installation of sprinklers in new homes mandatory.
2. The proposed National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (Housing) Order 2009, relating to Domestic Fire Safety - seeks to confer legislative competence on the National Assembly for Wales so that an Assembly Measure may be brought forward requiring all new build housing in Wales to be fitted with a fire sprinkler system.
3. The Legislative Competence Order (LCO) would enable the National Assembly for Wales to legislate in this area of policy. A Measure would then be brought forward making it a requirement for fire sprinklers to be fitted in new residential premises. This issue will be considered by the Privy Council early 2010.
4. This is seen across the fire and rescue sector as a very innovative and positive step in terms of community safety and community risk reduction. It is strongly supported by the Chief Fire Officer's Association.
5. The South East Regional Management Board wishes to formally seek a similar legislative outcome for England to ensure a continued reduction of risk of fire within the home.
6. It is considered that a mandatory requirement would save lives, improve firefighter safety, reduce damage to property and mitigate damage to the environment. It would also enable a less prescriptive and a more flexible approach to fire safety provisions at both the planning stage of new buildings and during their life-cycle. Additionally, it is considered that a change in legislation would provide a significant community safety invest to save function that would relatively quickly show positive results.

7. It is considered that statutory arrangements are necessary rather than voluntary measures and recommendations within codes of practice. This move would significantly increase public and firefighter safety during the life-cycle of the building stock.

8. The Second Report of Session 2009-10 to the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee - "Proposed National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (Housing) Order 2009, relating to Domestic Fire Safety" concludes that:

"A code of practice or guidance in relation to automatic fire suppression systems would not be guaranteed to achieve the aims proposed by the Member in charge of the Order. We therefore consider that the proposal to use a legislative route is appropriate"

9. It is therefore considered that an identical need exists within England and that a legislative outcome is necessary to ensure public safety.

10. The benefits and considerations for fire sprinklers in new homes are:

- A firefighter 24 hours a day in every room
- Proven life safety benefits for the type of buildings where the majority of fire deaths and injuries occur
- Flexibility and associated cost savings through relaxation of conventional fire precautions in houses such as fire doors and structural fire resistance
- Flexibility and associated cost savings through relaxation of requirements for fire service access on housing developments
- Reduced burden and associated cost savings for fire authorities and water undertakers for the provision and maintenance of fire hydrants
- Potential for reduced costs associated with infrastructure costs to provide additional fire stations to meet the risks posed by new housing developments by planning for extended times for fire engines to arrive
- Flexibility and associated cost savings for providing emergency responses and fire prevention activity in alternative ways based on a planning assumptions that any house fire will be contained and controlled for a substantial time
- Modern methods of construction (such as timber-framed buildings) can be adequately accommodated without post-incident high financial loss

- Within the USA the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 101 - Life Safety Code 2009 requires automatic sprinkler and detection, alarm and communications systems for new construction and change of occupancy classifications within buildings

- The installation of sprinklers within new homes in Wales will become mandatory
- The recent report of the Association of British Insurers (ABI) – "*Tackling Fire: A Call For Action*" – identifies that whilst the total number of fires has reduced the total insured losses have increased significantly (+16% in 2008) and states that more action is needed to address the increasing cost of fire. It calls for a wide ranging review of the case for sprinklers and effective fire compartments in new buildings.

- Environmental damage due to carbon monoxide emissions is minimised by early fire intervention
- Firefighter safety is vastly improved
- Overall resultant costs of fire (financial and social) are greatly reduced

11. Sprinklers save lives, improve firefighter safety, reduce damage to property and mitigate damage to the environment. The financial impact of fire losses will consequently be reduced significantly. A legislative framework conferring a statutory requirement to install sprinklers in all new homes will enable the fire and rescue service to continue to reduce community risk.

12. The SE Regional Management Board therefore requests that you support a similarly positive outcome by endorsing a requirement to install domestic sprinkler systems into new homes within the Region.

I look forward to receiving the outcomes of the Committee's deliberations

Yours sincerely

Bryan Cope

Chairman - South East Fire & Rescue Services' Regional Management Board