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New Report Details Home Fire Sprinkler Use in Bucks County, PA and Compares Fire Experience to Non-Sprinklered Homes

Frankfort, IL – A report that sheds new light on the lifesaving value of installing home fire sprinkler systems has been prepared for the nonprofit Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition (HFSC) by Fire Planning Associates, Inc., a comprehensive preplanning organization in Washington Crossing, PA in collaboration with the Bucks County Fire Marshals Association.

The group studied life safety and property protection in homes with and without fire sprinkler systems and reviewed fire experience in nearly 7,000 sprinklered homes in Buckingham, New Britain, Warrington, Warwick and Wrightstown Townships as well as Ivyland Borough.

In Bucks County, there were 90 home fire fatalities in non-sprinklered one- and two-family homes during 1988-2010. Those deaths made up 88% of all County fire deaths during that time. There were zero fire fatalities in homes protected by fire sprinkler systems. The report details five reported fires in sprinklered homes documented as saving at least five lives.

The average property loss in sprinklered-home fire incidents in Bucks County was \$14,000, compared to \$179,896 in damages to homes that experienced fires without fire sprinklers. The report found that fires in sprinklered homes required an average of 340 gallons of water to extinguish the fires. Homes without sprinklers required an average of 5,974 gallons (or nearly 25 tons) of water.

“HFSC initiates partnerships to capture and share useful data about widespread local experience with home fire sprinkler systems,” explains HFSC Chair Gary Keith. “This new data from southeastern Pennsylvania adds to our collection of educational materials that help improve and increase the public’s knowledge about the extreme danger of home fires and the lifesaving value of installing fire sprinkler systems.”

Previously, HFSC analyzed information on 10 and 15 years of home fire sprinkler experience in Scottsdale, AZ in partnership with the Scottsdale Fire Department. The reports have been among the most widely used HFSC educational tools.

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Bucks County—Add One

HFSC also published 1992-2007 data on home fire sprinkler systems in Prince George's County, MD, reviewed and analyzed with the Maryland State Fire Marshal's Office, the Prince George's County Fire Department, and the University of Maryland University College.

“The new report provides detailed Bucks County case study comparisons, which will especially help consumers understand the many reasons why installing fire sprinklers in homes protects residents, property, and firefighters, like no other technology can,” Keith adds.

All of the municipal reports share findings in common, including dramatically reduced fire deaths and property damage and far less water usage in sprinklered-home fires compared to fires in non-sprinklered homes.

Fire sprinklers are uniquely suited to protecting residents of homes – where more than 85% of all civilian structure fire deaths occur, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Most fatal home fires occur at night, when people are typically sleeping.

Working smoke alarms provide an early warning to alert or awaken occupants so they can deploy their escape plan. However, alarms can only detect a fire and signal it; they cannot control it. When only smoke alarms are present, survival is dependent upon the occupants' willingness and ability to quickly and appropriately respond (normally, to escape from the home).

Fire sprinklers do more. They detect a fire and also automatically flow water on it within seconds. That fast action controls the fire while it is still small, and in most cases extinguishes it. Controlling a fire in this initial stage limits the spread of deadly heat and smoke, and prevents flashover from occurring (the point at which everything in the room ignites).

Unchecked, a home fire becomes deadly in three minutes or less, according to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). Sprinklers are designed to control flames and give residents a safe opportunity to escape. This added time is especially valuable for the most vulnerable populations – young children, older adults, and people with disabilities that limit their mobility.

Because sprinklers keep a fire small, the structure remains safer for responding fire departments. That reduces injuries to firefighters.

Read the Bucks County report and all HFSC's municipal reports online at <http://homefiresprinkler.org/fire-department-bucks-county-report>.

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