



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

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Agenda Item Number: 3.

Agenda Date: 11/28/2017

In Control: Public Safety Committee

DEPARTMENT: SAFD

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Charles N. Hood

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT:

High-rise Fire Sprinkler Retrofit Briefing

SUMMARY:

In January of 2016, the San Antonio City Council approved an amendment to the 2015 International Fire Code requiring all high-rise buildings that do not have fire sprinklers to have these systems installed within 12 years. Through the FY16 budget process, council also approved the addition of a fire inspector to assist with inspections and the administration of the high-rise program. This briefing serves as an update to the progress of the high-rise inspection program and the stage of compliance for the affected buildings.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In February 2015, the (SAFD) requested approval of the Public Safety Committee to establish a stakeholder group to study the feasibility of a retroactive fire sprinkler requirement for high-rise buildings following the tragic events at the Wedgewood Apartments in Castle Hills. The stakeholder group met 5 times and included the San Antonio Housing Authority, the San Antonio Apartment Association, representatives from the Building Owner and Manager's Association, insurance industry representatives, sprinkler contractor representatives, various fire protection engineers, condominium owner's groups, and others. Ultimately, the ordinance was approved and the inspection program was established. Approximately 200 high-rises were initially identified as potentially meeting the criteria for the inspection program. Through the submittal of original architectural drawings, field measurements, inspection and verification, the list was reduced to 150 with 35 buildings needing to have fire sprinkler systems installed. As of November 20, 2017, over 400 high-rise inspections have

been conducted with some of them being follow-up inspections to verify that deficiencies have been corrected.

ISSUE:

The first phase of the sprinkler ordinance was that building owners had one year from Council approval to submit a “letter of intent” stating that they were aware of the ordinance and intend to comply. Our compliance rate is 91% with the remaining buildings in a state of acquiring new ownership or already in the process of installing sprinkler systems. Phase two requires owners to submit a compliance schedule outlining the anticipated course of action for full compliance. Building owners have through the end of 2018 to submit this plan to the SAFD. From the effective date of the ordinance, owners have 6 years to establish a water supply for the system, 9 years to have sprinkler system 50% installed, and 12 years for full compliance.

Some properties are moving quickly to have the work performed. Two residential high-rises have hired fire protection consulting and sprinkler firms to start the process. Owners stated that it not only improves the safety of the buildings faster, but that they want to have the work performed before prices increase. The San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) committed to having the upgrades performed in their 3 affected facilities within 6 years. SAHA reported that they were adjusting maintenance funding to accelerate the upgrade process. SAFD recently responded to a 2nd alarm structure fire in an unsprinklered SAHA high-rise.

Training and education are critical components in the survival of high-rise fires. After the Wedgewood incident, SAFD Fire Prevention’s Community Safety and Education (CS&E) group conducted training seminars at senior facilities on fire safety and survival. This group also conducts fire warden training for high-rises and assists with fire drills and emergency planning. SAFD will continue to provide this service and explore other avenues to address the fire and safety education of this target group.

RECOMMENDATION:

This item is for briefing purposes only.