



CARP's calls for Implementation of Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Recommendations

Enhanced fire safety standards are needed

Fire safety in retirement homes has long been a concern to CARP. There have been too many deadly fires at retirement homes throughout the province due to the lack of fire and building safety standards. Last year, fires broke out at Hawkesbury's Place Mont-Roc home, killing two people, and a few months before that incident, another fire had devastated Timmins' Rainbow Suites retirement home. The coroner's inquest for another deadly fire at the Muskoka Heights Retirement Residence in 2009 identified the lack of sprinklers as one of the potential causes for these deadly fires.

Since these events, CARP has called for sprinklers in retirement homes, which is addressed by the recent recommendations from the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). In its recommendations to enhance fire safety standards, the TAC recommends that retirement homes should have sprinklers. Other recommendations also include enhanced fire safety features, such as strategic placement fire exits, self-closing doors, and better communication systems and enhanced fire inspections and fire safety training, such as requiring more frequent fire drills and mandatory fire training of all supervisory staff.

Retirement should be required to have mandatory sprinklers

Retirement homes are currently excluded from mandatory sprinklers unlike long-term care homes. Retirement homes are considered residential occupancies, which means sprinklers are not required if the building meets other construction requirements under the Fire Code and Building Code, such as the minimum combustibility of materials and placement of fire separators for the height of the building. This has created a patchwork where some retirement homes had sprinklers and others did not, which means some residences were at greater risk of a fatal fire. Both long-term care homes and retirement homes have residents with a range of health and mobility challenges. Currently, however, only long-term care homes are required to have sprinklers and higher fire safety standards, whereas retirement homes are not, if other construction requirements are met, leaving their residents exposed to greater threat of fire emergencies.

Sprinklers in retirement homes will increase fire safety

CARP welcomes the TAC recommendations because it is exactly what CARP has consistently called on the Ontario government to do - to require sprinklers in all retirement homes and not just long-term care homes. The TAC recommends that the Ontario Fire Code (OFC) no longer use "care and detention occupancy" or "care and treatment occupant", neither of which retirement homes fall under, but instead adopt the definitions of the National Fire Code and National Building Code for "care occupancy", "detention occupancy", and "residential occupancy." The harmonization allows retirement homes to be included under care occupancy and, therefore, removes the unnecessary distinctions between long-term care homes, ensuring residents in retirement homes of greater fire protection. Also, the recommendations include a new retrofit section that requires all retirement homes regulated by and under the Retirement Homes Act to have sprinklers within 5 years after the regulation comes into force. No longer are



retirement homes exempted from having sprinklers because of the height of the building or construction material.

CARP calls for implementation and greater public awareness

CARP agrees that sprinklers are not the only solution but that it is part of a larger picture to ensuring fire safety. Other code enhancements and safety measures, such as strategically placed self-closing doors, fire separations, and clear safety plans are needed. Beyond mere building requirements, a change of ethics and attitude towards fire safety is also needed. The TAC recommends that Office of the Fire Marshal approved basic fire safety orientations and training courses be developed for building operators and supervisory staff and require owners to document training provided to their staff. This will encourage direct accountability to the Office of the Fire Marshal and prioritize fire safety among the staff of retirement homes, both of which CARP welcomes. However, CARP urges the government to prioritize the implementation and enforcement of sprinklers in all retirement homes.

CARP also calls on Government to ensure that there is sufficient public awareness. Current and future retirement home residents and their families should know about the changes and how they will be affected. Too often people are not aware of the standards that protect them or where to go if they have a complaint. In addition to implementation, Government needs to ensure that people know how they are being kept safe and where to go with their concerns and complaints. One fire tragedy is one too many. Moving forward on the TAC recommendations will help protect all residents in retirement homes.