



OPFFA

ONTARIO PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

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BY ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY

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The Hon. Rick Bartolucci, Minister
Community Safety & Correctional Services
25 Grosvenor Street, 18th Floor
Toronto, ON
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Dear Minister Bartolucci:

I watched with interest the March 19, 2010 airing of CBC's Marketplace. The episode titled "Burning Question" dealt with the question of sprinklers in long-term care facilities (nursing homes) in Ontario. Unfortunately, I would have to classify this piece of journalism as sensationalistic and narrow in scope rather than providing the full story that I would have expected from CBC. It also falls in line with recent coverage on this same subject in the Globe and Mail newspaper.

The Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association (OPFFA) is on the record with our support for mandatory sprinklers with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. However, increasing public and fire fighter safety through technology is only part of the solution.

With the continued focus on one side of this issue, we are concerned that there will be too much emphasis on and faith placed in technology resulting in a false sense of security. Fire suppression is and always will be labour intensive. The ability to arrive on scene quickly with the resources necessary to conduct interior rescue is a critical factor in the survivability in any structure fire, and especially one in a nursing home. The OPFFA supports sprinklers but cautions that they are not a magic bullet; they are only one of the many tools required to adequately protect the residents in the event of a structure fire.

Both of the previously mentioned media outlets focused on the events surrounding a fire in a nursing home in Orillia and past Coroner's inquests into fire deaths that occurred in other seniors' facilities (Mississauga specifically). It is our understanding that the initial fire department response to the Orillia fire was only two full-time fire fighters on the first arriving truck, which should be equally alarming. The 1996 Mississauga inquest recommendations did include the installation of sprinklers, however they also included many other code changes, as well as recommendations for additional fire fighting staff to respond to these incidents. Facts not mentioned in any of the media coverage.



This clearly illustrates that when everything is considered there is a much larger effort required to enhance the safety of these vulnerable citizens.

We recognize and welcome the installation of sprinklers as an *additional* (emphasis added) safety measure. However, all factors must be considered from existing code compliance, to implementing approved fire safety plans, to proper emergency response capabilities, prior to simply passing legislation mandating sprinklers and assuming all lives will be saved.

We caution the government in reacting without consultation with all stakeholders and consideration of all factors to ensure the scarce budget dollars available are utilized to their maximum potential.

Should you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me. We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fred LeBlanc". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "F" and "L".

Fred LeBlanc,
President

Cc: Mr. Pat Burke, Ontario Fire Marshal
Mr. Richard Boyes, President, Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs