

# LOS ANGELES FIRE COMMISSION

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EXECUTIVE OFFICE  
200 NORTH MAIN STREET, SUITE 1840  
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012

(213) 978-3838 PHONE  
(213) 978-3814 FAX

September 5, 2017

Honorable Members of the City Council  
City of Los Angeles  
City Hall, Room 395  
Attn: City Clerk

## [BFC 17-100] – NON-SPRINKLERED RESIDENTIAL HIGH-RISE ACTION PLAN

At its meeting of September 5, 2017, the Board of Fire Commissioners approved the Non-Sprinklered Residential High-Rise Action Plan report and its recommendations. The report is hereby transmitted to the City Council for consideration and approval.

Should you need additional information, please contact the Board of Fire Commissioners' office at 213-978-3838.

Sincerely,

Isela Iñiguez  
Acting Commission Executive Assistant

Attachment

cc: Board of Fire Commissioners (without attachments)  
Fire Chief Ralph M. Terrazas (without attachments)

September 5, 2017

**LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT**



APPROVED. 9/5/2017  
BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS  
BY:   
COMMISSION EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

RALPH M. TERRAZAS  
FIRE CHIEF

August 18, 2017

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS  
FILE NO. 17-100

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners

FROM: Ralph M. Terrazas, Fire Chief

SUBJECT: NON-SPRINKLERED RESIDENTIAL HIGH-RISE ACTION PLAN

FINAL ACTION:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved w/Corrections	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn
	<input type="checkbox"/> Denied	<input type="checkbox"/> Received & Filed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

**SUMMARY**

Due to the recent multiple fatality fires which have occurred in several non-sprinklered high-rise buildings throughout the nation and abroad, the Los Angeles Fire Department's (LAFD) Fire Prevention Bureau (FPB) created an aggressive action plan to decrease the community's risk. The FPB took a proactive approach to immediately identify, prioritize, and thoroughly inspect all 55 non-sprinklered residential high-rises in the City of Los Angeles. These actions ensure that the current fire life safety systems are in good working order and that the fire code is enforced. The action plan includes additional steps to ensure building owners and occupants are well informed of the risks and educated on fire life safety measures (proposed retrofitted fire sprinkler system) that would increase overall safety.

The LAFD historically identifies non-sprinklered high-rise buildings as occupancies that present an increased risk to the public and first responders. Modern fire protection in the form of sprinklers is arguably the best known fire protection method to assist in saving lives prior to Fire Department arrival.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Board:

1. Approve the FPB's Non-Sprinklered Residential High-Rise Action Plan which will provide an information packet identifying these structures as "non-sprinklered" high-rise buildings, posing increase risk to current and future tenants. This responsibility will include the following:
  - a. Provide a written letter from the Fire Marshal and Fire Chief to all tenants and employees with the intent to provide awareness to the inherent risk (providing a written evacuation plan to each tenant and employee).

- b. Posting the plan on each floor (currently required) and consulting an LAFD Certified High-Rise Consultant to provide the specific sections of the fire code related to emergency planning and preparedness that should be in place and adhered to.
  - c. Requiring documentation of routine fire/evacuation drills and maintain trained floor wardens
- 2. Support a proposed retrofit ordinance motion, requiring all previously exempt non-sprinklered residential high-rise buildings conform to current fire code requirements for retrofitted high rise buildings.
- 3. Transmit Board Report to the City Council in response to the Public Safety Committee Motion on August 4, 2017 (Council File No. 04-1672-S1).

## **DISCUSSION**

The FPB took a proactive approach in creating an aggressive action plan to ensure all 55 non-sprinklered residential high-rises were prioritized and inspected. Councilmember Koretz introduced a motion asking the LAFD to identify the scope surrounding non-sprinklered residential high-rises so that City Council would better understand the problem and decide what steps to take to address it.

A prior City ordinance required all commercial non-sprinklered high-rise buildings to be retro-fitted and fully sprinklered. At the time the ordinance became effective, non-sprinklered residential high-rises built between 1943 through 1974 were exempt from the requirement. Three residential high-rise buildings in this category have been identified as proactively retrofitted and have installed sprinkler systems.

These non-sprinklered residential high-rises were required to install the following fire life safety systems: exit signs, fire escapes, automatic self-closing fire doors (corridors), automatic self-closing fire doors (elevator lobbies), smoke detectors (hallways, bedrooms, and elevator lobbies), fire extinguishers, Class I standpipe system, Class II standpipe system (including fire hose cabinet for occupant use), and fire sprinklers located in the basement/carport only.

The goal is to aggressively provide a means by which building/property owners can render their properties safe by utilizing retrofitted sprinkler systems. Building/property owners continually ensure that tenants within the buildings are well informed and minimally trained in hazard recognition and mitigation efforts.

The cost associated with retrofitting non-sprinklered high-rise buildings is a significant expense for building owners. These buildings are currently exempt from fire code requirements for retrofit sprinklers based on the historic cost associated with retrofitting buildings constructed prior to ordinance requirements for sprinklers.

The FPB has also researched estimated costs associated with sprinkler retrofits within non-sprinklered residential high-rise buildings and has determined the following:

- Estimated average per building - \$1,600,000 for a 16-story high-rise
- Estimated average per unit - \$6,000 excluding asbestos abatement and demo work
- Estimated timeline for completion - three years
- Potential issues associated with retrofits are:
  - Construction features potentially limiting capability and aesthetics
  - Timeline for retrofit
  - Disruption to tenants (elderly and infirmed may be particularly impacted)
  - Cost
    - **Asbestos removal (Unknown Cost)**
    - Increased operating costs passed onto tenants
    - Increased cost to individual unit (condominium) owners
    - **Financial Tools**
      - HUD/FHA loans
      - Multifamily housing revenue bonds
      - State issued Federal tax cuts

The current occupants of non-sprinklered residential high-rises should be well informed of the risks associated and educated on a comprehensive evacuation plan. It is essential that evacuation plans are exercised on a routine basis to provide for their safety and security. It is the goal of the LAFD to exhaust all options to ensure the safety of these individuals.

LAFD Action Plan:

Beginning June 19, 2017, the High-Rise Unit cadre of 11 Inspectors performed the following:

- Identified all non-sprinklered residential high-rise buildings within their respective districts (55 total)
- Conducted thorough inspections of all identified non-sprinklered residential high-rise building within their respective districts
- All existing fire/life safety violations were identified and non-compliance notices were written to document these findings

- Each non-sprinklered residential high-rise current fire protective warning and protection systems “Regulation 4 permit certifications” were verified utilizing the Brycer Compliance Engine
- A historical profile was established for each non-sprinklered residential high-rise, detailing the following:
  - Past fires within the structure
  - Past fire/life safety violations (notices) written
  - Fire related fatalities within these structures over the past 38 years
  - All fire/life safety legal proceedings past or present (for each respective building) identified
  - Building Owners identified as corporate vs. privately owned condominiums
  - Identify which buildings are occupied by the elderly or special needs

The FPB has pending fire/life safety violations past 30 days for 26 buildings. We are in the process of completing 26 legal packets and working with the City Attorney to gain compliance in these buildings.

## **CONCLUSION**

The mission of the LAFD is to preserve life and property by reprioritizing and conducting timely fire life safety inspections. The main focus is to decrease the overall risk to building occupants. Fire sprinkler systems have proven to save lives and reduce property damage. The LAFD will continue to provide leadership, direction, support, and research toward a City-wide ordinance to retrofit the 55 remaining residential high-rise buildings with fire sprinkler systems.

Board Report prepared by Patrick Hayden, Battalion Chief, Industrial and Commercial Section.