

# Make sprinklers mandatory in new homes: Fire chiefs

BY GWENDOLYN RICHARDS, CALGARY HERALD MARCH 24, 2010



Fire chiefs across the country are calling on the federal government to ensure sprinkler systems are installed in all new homes and residential buildings.

**Photograph by:** Gordon Deeks, [edmontonjournal.com](http://edmontonjournal.com)

---

CALGARY — Fire chiefs across the country are calling on the federal government to ensure sprinkler systems are installed in all new homes and residential buildings.

The proposal is one of several the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs is putting to the federal government this week in Ottawa.

Association president Bruce Burrell said automatic sprinklers — particularly in combination with smoke and carbon monoxide detectors — are key to containing and suppressing blazes before firefighters arrive and can determine whether residents survive a fire.

The use of cheaper building materials now means the time frame for escape is shrinking, said Burrell, who is also chief of the Calgary Fire Department.

"They burn hotter, they burn faster. That means more heat and gases, so the survivability in buildings is changing," he said.

The association has been lobbying the government on the issue since 2007. Since then, there have been 764,000 housing starts with another 165,000 projected for this year, according to the group.

"What we're really trying to get to is a point where we see all buildings with sprinklers," he said.

The problem was brought back into focus following some fatal fires in nursing homes in Ontario.

Burrell added the association also believes the government should put forward incentives to entice highrise and high-occupancy residential buildings to be retrofitted with sprinklers.

In Alberta, sprinklers are required in building apartments and hallways. An update last year to the building code also made it mandatory for sprinklers to be installed in the attics and balconies of low-rise buildings with wooden frames.

Fire chiefs are also calling for tax relief for volunteer firefighters who make up the majority of the country's fire service. Recruitment and retention is an ongoing struggle for volunteer fire departments and the hope is some compensation — in the form of tax relief or a tax credit — would help.

Across Canada, 84,000 volunteer firefighters make up 78 per cent of the country's fire services personnel, serving 90 per cent of Canadian communities.

In addition, the association is asking for the federal government to increase funding to the Joint Emergency Preparedness Program. Currently, it receives \$5 million per year. Fire chiefs would like to see that increased to \$30 million.

Emergency services can apply to the program for money — which they must match dollar for dollar — to pay for equipment and programs approved through the provinces.