



County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax County

Office of the Fire Chief

May 23, 2016

Dear:

Recently, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (VDHCD) established a workgroup comprised of building code and industry officials to review and amend the Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC). Unfortunately, this is not a collaborative process and the workgroup does not represent the best interests of fire officials or members of the fire service community. Thus far, this workgroup's recommendations significantly dilute the SFPC, including deletion of over 1,800 individual code sections. Many of the recommended deletions impact the safety of our residents, visitors, businesses, and firefighting personnel. The workgroup's recommendations may endanger the county's current ISO rating resulting in an adverse impact on the county's ability to attract businesses to the community and the subsequent sources of revenue.

In an effort to fully assess the potential impact of this workgroup's recommendations, the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department's Fire Prevention staff and I are planning the following actions:

1. Our Fire Prevention Division staff will be attending future workgroup sessions to monitor the workgroup's recommendations and to witness their discussions regarding proposed changes. This will involve several trips to Richmond, Virginia for the workgroup sessions.
2. Two of our Fire Prevention Division's fire protection engineers have been assigned to evaluate and prepare impact statements regarding this workgroup's recommendations. These two individuals are subject matter experts in both the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC) and the SFPC.
3. Our Fire Prevention Division staff will provide members of the Board of Supervisors a briefing regarding the potential adverse impacts to the safety of the county and any revenue impact.

**Proudly Protecting and
Serving Our Community**

Fire and Rescue Department
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Fairfax, VA 22030
703-246-2126
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fire



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4. Staff will coordinate with the county's Legislative Director and staff regarding our concerns. This will allow the Legislative Director to develop a plan for advocating the county's best interests.
5. Staff will work with the County Attorney's office regarding the potential for any future injunctive or legal actions that the county governing body may consider. A full impact statement will be developed with code references for the County Attorney's office.
6. The Fire Prevention Division is working closely with other fire officials throughout the Commonwealth to assess the impact of the workgroup's recommendations. This will allow the fire service to coordinate its efforts with regard to any public comment and hearings involved in the process of amending the SFPC.
7. Educational efforts will begin with professional stakeholder organizations such as the Fairfax County Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics (IAFF Local 2068), Virginia Professional Fire Fighters, and Virginia Fire Chiefs Association, Inc. regarding any impact to firefighting safety directly related to the recommended code changes.

We have prepared the enclosed Executive Summary with informational components regarding background and enforcement authorities afforded the Fire Marshal, as well as high level assessments of the recommendations made by the workgroup thus far. For your information, I have enclosed a CD that includes actual workgroup recommendations with comments noted by the workgroup. It is my belief that the efforts of this workgroup violate statutes contained within the Code of Virginia and undermine the critical working relationships that exist between fire and building officials throughout the Commonwealth.

This issue is a very high priority project for the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department and our Fire Prevention Division. We are fully prepared to brief you and prepare correspondence on your behalf to our county leadership, legislative team, county attorney, and other stakeholder groups that are affected by the proposed changes. Our chief concern regarding what we view as weakening the SFPC is the inherent negative impact to the safety of our residents, visitors, and operational personnel throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Respectfully,

Fire Chief Richard Bowers
Fire and Rescue Department

Enclosures