

Fire Sprinkler Requirements for Places of Worship, Protecting People and Property

Draft for Commission Review and Comment

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Fire Sprinkler Requirements for Places of Worship, Protecting People and Property

From 2009 through 2013, there were 161 fires in places of worship in Tennessee. Those in places of worship without sprinklers caused an average of \$122,590 in damage per fire, nearly 8.5 times the amount of damage caused in places of worship with sprinklers, \$14,467 per fire. No one died in any of these fires, but three firefighters were injured in places without sprinklers. Tennessee's experience demonstrates that sprinkler systems help suppress fires and reduce the risk of both injury and loss of life as well as the cost of property damage.

Like most states, Tennessee has required sprinkler systems in buildings with rooms designed to accommodate large groups of people, including places of worship, at least since the 1980s. Exiting these buildings safely in an emergency is difficult, especially during a fire. The panic that often ensues can further endanger the lives of the people in the structure as well as the firefighters called to the scene. The current building code requires places of worship to have sprinklers if the auditorium

1. exceeds 12,000 square feet,
2. has an occupant load of 300 or more, or
3. is located on a floor other than the level of the building exit.

Architects of places of assembly that accommodate 300 or more people, including places of worship, must submit plans that meet all building standards, including these sprinkler requirements, for approval by the state fire marshal's office before construction begins.

Automatic sprinkler systems are effective in 96% of fires when they are activated, and they are activated 91% of the time. More importantly, national data show that sprinklers in places of worship contain a fire to its room of origin in 83% of all fire incidents. Limiting a fire's spread is important for the safety of community members and firefighters. A National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health investigation of a fire that engulfed a church without sprinklers in Carthage, Tennessee, that resulted in one firefighter fatality and two firefighter injuries recommended installing sprinkler systems in places of worship. The report noted that sprinklers reduce risks to community members and firefighters because they can contain fires until the fire department arrives.

In 2013, the Dyson Grove Baptist Church in Johnson County, Tennessee, moved into a new, larger building that the congregation had built on a rural site without access to a public water supply. The church does not have a sprinkler system, and the architect who designed it did not submit plans to the state fire marshal's office. A state electrical inspector, seeing that the plans were not approved, reported the violation to the state fire marshal's office, which required the church to submit plans. According to the state fire marshal's office, the church's sanctuary can accommodate 369 people, large enough to require an automatic sprinkler system. The fire marshal's office allowed the church to continue using the building while the architect and church members developed a plan of action to comply with the code, for

example by reducing the size of the sanctuary or installing an automatic sprinkler system with a water tank and pump sufficient to support it.

The Dyson Grove congregation, believing that their building should be exempted from the current sprinkler requirement, asked their legislators to change the law. In response to their request, a bill was introduced to exempt single-story places of worship located in unincorporated areas from state laws and regulations requiring places of assembly to have fire protection sprinkler systems as long as they

- have a capacity of no more than 400 persons;
- do not have a water supply located on the property;
- have a minimum of two exits, plus one additional exit for every 2,500 square feet or portion thereof over 4,500 square feet;
- have a fire alarm system;
- have fixed seating for at least 250 persons; and
- were built on or after July 1, 2012.

Only six states have exceptions such as these, and one of them—Florida—is considering eliminating theirs. Delaware and Massachusetts actually require sprinklers for smaller places of assembly than does Tennessee.

The proposed legislation, House Bill 1649 by Representative Timothy Hill (Senate Bill 1749 by Nicely), was sent to the Commission by the House Local Government Subcommittee (see appendix A for a copy). Citing the threat that it posed to the health, safety, and welfare of community members, firefighters, and property, no engineers, architects, or fire officials interviewed by commission staff support the bill. The Commission agrees.

Building Codes

Modern building codes in the United States date to the late nineteenth century. Often these codes were developed in response to historic fires. For example, Chicago enacted new standards for building design and construction in response to the Great Fire of 1871. Most of these codes were local; often they contradicted each other. Following the Baltimore fire of 1904, reformers began working to standardize building codes throughout the United States. Today, there are two primary organizations—the International Code Council (ICC) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)—that develop model codes, including building, fire, and electrical codes, for adoption at the state and local level.¹

¹ Ellen Vaughan and Jim Turner, *The Value and Impact of Building Codes* (Washington, D.C.: Environmental and Energy Study Institute, 2013), 6; and Insurance Institute for Business & Home

The majority of states have adopted either the ICC's International Building Code (IBC) or the NFPA's 101 Life Safety Code (LSC). Both codes have similar requirements. Even in states that have not adopted either code, local jurisdictions often have adopted the IBC or LSC.

Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 68-120-101, gives the state fire marshal within the Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance, the authority to adopt and enforce rules establishing minimum statewide safety standards for fire prevention, fire protection, and building construction. The law requires that the standards provide a "reasonable degree of safety to life and property from fire and hazards incident to the design, construction, alteration and repair of buildings or structures."² Currently, the fire marshal has adopted the 2006 edition of the International Building Code published by the International Code Council.³

Since the 1980s⁴, the state's adopted building code has required sprinkler systems to be installed in buildings that accommodate large groups of people, including but not limited to places of worship, community halls, gymnasiums, and libraries. These buildings are difficult to exit safely in emergencies. The panic that often ensues during a fire can further endanger both the people within the structure and firefighters responding to the scene, putting them at greater risk for injury and loss of life. The state code mandates that a place of worship have sprinkler systems if the auditorium or any other room

1. exceeds 12,000 square feet,
2. has an occupant load⁵ of 300 or more, or
3. is located on a floor other than the level of building exit.⁶

The state fire marshal's office requires architects of places of assembly that accommodate 300 or more people, including places of worship, to submit building plans for approval before construction can begin.

Safety, *Building Code Resources* (Tampa, FL: Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety, undated), 3.

² Fire Prevention Division, "Codes Enforcement Section – Information," Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://www.tn.gov/fire/fpcesect.shtml>.

³ Rules of Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance Division of Fire Prevention, Chapter 0780-02-02, <http://www.tn.gov/sos/rules/0780/0780-02/0780-02-02.20100627.pdf>.

⁴ TACIR interview with Assistant Commissioner Gary West, State Fire Marshal's Office within the Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance, July 17, 2014.

⁵ Occupant load refers to the number of people who can safely occupy and exit a building. For the IBC definition, see International Code Council, *International Building Code, 2006*, 9th ed. (Country Club Hills, IL: International Code Council, 2006), 1002.1.

http://publicecodes.cyberregs.com/icod/ibc/2006f2/icod_ibc_2006f2_10_paroo4.htm?bu=IC-P-2006-000001&bu2=IC-P-2006-000019.

⁶ International Code Council, *International Building Code, 2006*, 903.2.1.3.

Sprinkler Systems for Places of Worship in Unincorporated Areas

Dyson Grove Baptist Church in Johnson County is an example of a place of worship in an unincorporated area of Tennessee that is required by codes to install a sprinkler system. In 2013, the church congregation completed and moved into a new, larger building on a rural site without access to a public water supply. The church did not install a sprinkler system, and the architect who designed it did not submit plans to the state fire marshal's office. A state electrical inspector realized that the plans were not approved and reported the violation. The state fire marshal's office then required the architect to submit his plans for the building. According to the state fire marshal's office, the church's sanctuary can accommodate 369 people, large enough to require a sprinkler system. The state fire marshal allowed the Dyson Grove congregation to continue using the church while the architect and church members developed a plan of action to meet the requirements of the building code, for example by reducing the size of the sanctuary or installing an automatic sprinkler system with a water tank and pump sufficient to support it.

Referred Legislation

The members of Dyson Grove, believing that their building should be exempted from the current sprinkler requirement, asked their legislators to change the law. They have found that neither the well the church uses for its other water needs nor the stream that runs adjacent to the property is sufficient to support a sprinkler system. Church members also contend that connecting to the local water utility or installing a water tank and pump would be cost prohibitive.

House Bill 1649⁷ by Representative Timothy Hill (Senate Bill 1749 by Nicely), which was sent to the Commission by the House Local Government Subcommittee, would have amended current law to exempt single-story places of worship located in unincorporated areas from state laws and regulations requiring places of assembly to have fire protection sprinkler systems as long as they

- have a capacity of no more than 400 persons;
- not have a water supply located on the property;
- have a minimum of two exits, plus one additional exit for every 2,500 square feet or portion thereof over 4,500 square feet;
- have a fire alarm system;
- have fixed seating for at least 250 persons; and
- have been built on or after July 1, 2012.

House Bill 1649 would have allowed more places of worship to be built without fire sprinklers and allowed more people in those buildings. The conditions would have made the Tennessee

⁷ See Appendix A.

building code less stringent than the current minimum standard. Because the bill only applies to unincorporated locations that do not have a water supply, the affected buildings would have likely been in rural areas. In interviews with commission staff, engineers, architects, and fire officials cited the threat that the bill posed to the health, safety, and welfare of community members, firefighters, and property. For example, the Tennessee Fire Chief's Association opposed the bill in its entirety on the premise that the codes provide the minimum standard of safety.⁸ The Tennessee Society of Professional Engineers and the American Council of Engineering Companies of Tennessee both opposed the bill, stating that their main priority is the "health, safety, and welfare of the public." They said people visiting churches for special events would not necessarily know how to exit the building in a fire, increasing the risk for community members and firefighters.⁹ And in an April 2014 press release,¹⁰ they also stated that the bill had the potential to compromise safety, one of the organization's most important tenets. Finally, according to the vice president of TWH Architects, Inc., which also opposed the bill, churches accommodate large numbers of people, making them particularly dangerous in the event of a fire in remote rural areas; sprinklers increase the safety of people using these buildings as well as firefighters.¹¹

Do other states make sprinkler exceptions for places of worship?

Only eight states make an exception to the automatic fire sprinkler requirement for places of worship, and of these eight, two make the requirement more stringent. See table 1. For example, Delaware lowered the square footage threshold for installing sprinklers from 12,000 to 10,000 square feet if a water system is available and stipulated that individual rooms may not exceed 10,000 square feet in buildings where no private or public water distribution system is available. Similarly, Massachusetts lowered the square footage threshold from 12,000 to 5,000 square feet.

⁸ TACIR interview with Chief Roger Robinson, President, Tennessee Fire Chief's Association, June 9, 2014.

⁹ TACIR interview with Candy Toler, Executive Director, Tennessee Society of Professional Engineers and American Council of Engineering Companies of Tennessee, May 6, 2014.

¹⁰ Tennessee Society of Professional Engineers and American Council of Engineering Companies of Tennessee, "Fire Sprinkler Requirements," press release, April 6, 2014.

¹¹ TACIR interview with Trey Wheeler, Vice President and Head of Government Relations Committee, TWH Architects, Inc., May 14, 2014.

Table 1. States with Exceptions to Fire Sprinkler Requirements for Places of Worship

State	Adopted Codes	Exemption
More stringent than Adopted Code		
Delaware	NFPA 101	Reduced square footage threshold from 12,000 to 10,000 square feet.
Massachusetts	2009 IBC	Reduced square footage threshold from 12,000 to 5,000 square feet.
Less Stringent than Adopted Code		
Florida	2009 IBC and 2009 NFPA 101	Increased occupant load threshold from zero to 100.
Indiana	2006 IBC	Reduced square footage threshold from 12,000 to 7,000 square feet and removed occupant load threshold.
Kentucky	2012 IBC	Removed occupant load threshold and level of exit discharge requirement.
North Carolina	2009 IBC	Removed occupant load threshold.
Ohio	2009 IBC	Removed square footage and occupant load threshold.
Virginia	2012 IBC	Removed occupant load threshold.

Source: Information gathered from state fire marshal’s offices and building codes departments in each state.

Six states—Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, and Virginia—have adopted various exceptions for places of worship that make the sprinkler requirement less stringent. Each of these states has chosen either to remove or increase the occupant load threshold. Ohio also removed the square footage threshold, and Kentucky made an exception for places of worship in which the auditorium is located on a floor other than the level of exit from the building.

Like House Bill 1649 in Tennessee, the code modifications that these six states have made allow more places of worship to be built without sprinklers. Representatives from the building code department or state fire marshal’s office in five of these six states cited the interests of rural places of worship without access to water as the reason for creating an exception to the sprinkler requirements. Florida alone specifically acted to exempt fellowship halls that lack fixed seating. Florida is also currently reviewing whether or not to remove its exception to the code.

Balancing Short and Long Term Property Costs to Congregations and the Community

Passing legislation that will exempt more places of worship from the sprinkler requirements can reduce initial construction costs for congregations. Particularly in rural and unincorporated areas where access to an adequate supply of water is not guaranteed, the short term savings could total close to \$200,000 because additional storage and pumping equipment would no longer have to be purchased and installed.¹² The failure to include a sprinkler system in a place of worship could increase the property's insurance premiums, but this additional yearly cost is small compared to the lump-sum savings on the construction of an operable sprinkler system.¹³ There are no immediate costs to the general public because it is highly unlikely that community insurance ratings will be affected.¹⁴

In the long term, however, exempting a larger number of places of worship from the sprinkler requirements could lead to significant costs for congregations and communities in the event of fire. From 2009 through 2013, there were 161 fires in places of worship in Tennessee.¹⁵ During the same time period, the average property loss per fire in places of worship that did not have sprinklers was nearly 8.5 times greater than in places of worship with sprinklers—\$122,590 per fire without sprinklers compared to only \$14,467 per fire with sprinklers.¹⁶ This means that over the course of a building's projected forty year lifespan a sprinkler system will pay for itself after just two fire incidents. Because fires in places of worship without sprinklers are likely to cause severe damage that will prevent the continued use of those structures, one must also consider the potentially devastating intangible costs that could result from the loss of important communal space. Following a 2012 fire that destroyed Lebanon Church of God in Lebanon, Tennessee, a church member said the church fire was like dealing with the loss of a family member.¹⁷ Although they are difficult to quantify, these emotional and psychological costs can be burdensome both for the congregation and the community as a whole.

Risks to Community Members and Firefighters are Significantly Increased

More importantly, allowing more places of worship to be built without sprinklers will significantly increase the safety risks that community members and firefighters face. Although there were no community members killed or injured in fires in places of worship either with

¹² This figure was obtained from Division Manager Richard Smith, Superior Fire Protection and church member Chris Vannoy, Dyson Grove Baptist Church.

¹³ TACIR interview with Chuck Bidek, Chief Executive Officer, Insurors of Tennessee, August 8, 2014.

¹⁴ TACIR interview with Brian Hoffmeister, Director of Policy Analysis Section, Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance, August 8, 2014.

¹⁵ Email from Peyton Bullen, Program and Policy Director, Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance, May 27, 2014.

¹⁶ Email from Peyton Bullen, Program and Policy Director, Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance, May 27, 2014.

¹⁷ "Electrical Problem Likely Caused Lebanon Church Fire," *WSMV*, December 16, 2012, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://www.wsmv.com/story/20128968/fire-destroys-lebanon-church>.

sprinklers or without in Tennessee from 2009 through 2013, nationwide, fires in places of worship killed an average of two and injured an average of nineteen people each year.¹⁸ However, the NFPA reports no injuries or loss of life in fire incidents at places of worship with sprinklers.¹⁹ The presence of large groups makes it more difficult to exit places of worship and other assemblies safely and may result in panic in an emergency.²⁰ Fixed seating, including pews in places of worship, also limits movement, especially for visitors who do not use the building frequently and may not be familiar with its layout.²¹ Sprinklers reduce the danger that fires in places of worship pose to community members.

Fires in places of worship without sprinklers also increase the risks to firefighters. From 2008 through 2012 in the US, 41 firefighters on average were killed each year while responding to fires.²² On August 1, 2004, a volunteer fire chief—a veteran firefighter with 48 years of experience—died from injuries sustained while fighting a fire at a church in Carthage, Tennessee, when the structure partially collapsed. Two other firefighters were injured in the incident. The building did not have sprinklers.²³ The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) conducted a full investigation of the fire. NIOSH focused on the importance of functioning sprinklers to the safety of firefighters in its report, suggesting that “there is a strong possibility that sprinklers could reduce fire fighter fatalities, since they [the sprinklers] contain, and even extinguish, fire prior to the arrival of the fire department.”²⁴ From 2009 through 2013, no firefighters in Tennessee were injured or killed in fires that occurred in places of worship that had sprinklers while there were three firefighter injuries—though no fatalities—in fires at places of worship without sprinklers.²⁵ The state has a special obligation to protect those who serve the public by risking their lives. In an interview with commission staff, the state fire marshal observed that fighting fires in assemblies, including

¹⁸ Email from Peyton Bullen, Program and Policy Director, Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance, May 27, 2014; and Richard Campbell, *U.S. Structure Fires in Religious and Funeral Properties* (Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association, 2013), Abstract.

¹⁹ Hall, *U.S. Experience with Sprinklers* (2013), 35.

²⁰ Gregory Harrington, “Assembly Occupancies,” in *Systems Approaches to Property Class*, vol. 2, sec. 13, *Fire Protection Handbook*, eds. Arthur E. Cote et al., 19th ed. (Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association, 2003), 29.

²¹ Harrington, “Assembly Occupancies,” 30.

²² US Fire Administration, “On-Duty Firefighter Fatalities 1977-2012,” Federal Emergency Management Agency, last modified January 27, 2014, accessed August 19, 2014, http://www.usfa.fema.gov/fireservice/firefighter_health_safety/firefighter-fatalities/reports/yearly_fatalities.shtm.

²³ Virginia Lutz, “Volunteer Chief Dies and Two Fire Fighters are Injured by a Collapsing Church Facade – Tennessee,” *Death in the Line of Duty*, National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, January 13, 2006, 2-4, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fire/pdfs/face200437.pdf>.

²⁴ Lutz, “Volunteer Chief Dies,” 8.

²⁵ Email from Peyton Bullen, Program and Policy Director, Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance, May 27, 2014.

places of worship, is more dangerous than in other buildings and that sprinklers reduce the risks that firefighters face.²⁶

Sprinklers are a first line of defense that can help suppress a fire and prevent its spread. According to the NFPA, automatic sprinklers are effective in 96% of fires when they are activated, and they are activated 91% of the time.²⁷ In places of worship that have sprinkler systems, 83% of all fires are confined to their room of origin compared to only 54 percent in those without.²⁸ Almost all fatalities in fires in which sprinklers operated were in the fire's room of origin, suggesting that victims were too close to escape. In contrast more than half of all fatalities in fires without sprinklers were in other areas of the building.²⁹ Suppressing and containing fires, therefore, is important for the safety of community members and firefighters. Especially in areas that rely on volunteer fire departments the difficulty of alerting firefighters lengthens the response times of even the best trained, best equipped departments.³⁰ In Tennessee, almost 80 percent of fire departments are volunteer forces.³¹ Sprinklers are also important in communities that lack adequate fire hydrants or sources of water because sprinkler systems can be designed to use water from a storage tank on site.

Water Tanks and Pumps

The building code adopts water supply standards for sprinklers that vary depending on the type of system and the type of building in which it is being installed. These water supply requirements ensure that a sprinkler system will have adequate water pressure for a long enough period of time to suppress a fire.³² For example the water supply needed for a particular system might be 500 gallons per minute for one hour. If access to a public or private water source is not available or is not sufficient, then an alternative water supply system must be installed.

The choices for alternative water supply systems vary depending on the location of the property and the type of building and include but are not limited to the use of pumps, tanks, and reservoirs. Tanks can be elevated, on-ground, or underground, and can be constructed

²⁶ TACIR interview with Assistant Commissioner Gary West, State Fire Marshal's Office within the Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance, July 17, 2014.

²⁷ John R. Hall, Jr., *U.S. Experience with Sprinklers* (Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association, 2013), 7.

²⁸ Hall, *U.S. Experience with Sprinklers* (2013), 26.

²⁹ Hall, *U.S. Experience with Sprinklers* (2013), 32 and 36.

³⁰ Carl Bialik, "The Fire Countdown Clock," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 20, 2012, <http://blogs.wsj.com/numbers/the-fire-countdown-clock-1134/>.

³¹ Dr. David H. Folz, et al., *An Analysis of Civilian Residential Fire Deaths in Tennessee, 2002-2010* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2011).

³² The Fire Protection Research Foundation, *Fire Flow Water Consumption in Sprinklered and Unsprinklered Buildings: An Assessment of Community Impacts* (Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association, 2012), 1.

and installed in many different ways.³³ Architects and engineers may choose between these alternatives to meet the property owner's needs and comply with the code.³⁴

The cost of installing a tank and pump system is approximately \$200,000. Hurricane Chapel in Humphreys County is a church in rural Tennessee that does not have access to a public water supply. In 2013, the church began planning a new addition that would require a sprinkler system to comply with the building code. Because of the church's limited access to water, its initial plan included the installation of a water tank and pump. The total estimated cost for the proposed project was \$237,717, of which \$196,617 was the cost of the water supply system. Before the project broke ground, the congregation decided to reduce the size of the addition, eliminating the need for a sprinkler system to comply with the code.³⁵

³³ National Fire Protection Association, *Standard for Water Tanks for Private Fire Protection*, vol. 2, sec. 22, *2006 National Fire Codes* (Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association, 2006), 5.

³⁴ TACIR interview with Assistant Commissioner Gary West and Director of Codes Enforcement Christopher Bainbridge, State Fire Marshal's Office within the Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance, July 17, 2014.

³⁵ TACIR interview with Division Manager Richard Smith, Superior Fire Protection.

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Persons Interviewed

Chris Bainbridge, Director
Codes Enforcement
Tennessee Department of Commerce and
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Peyton Bullen, Director of Policy and
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Fire Prevention Division
Tennessee Department of Commerce and
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Ron Burton
Building Owners and Managers Association

Greg Carrell, Acting Fire Marshall
Missouri State Fire Marshall

Ashley Cates, Executive Director
American Institute of Architects

Mel Cosgrove, Senior Regional Manager
State and Local Governmental Relations
International Code Council

James Cothron, Executive Director
Tennessee Board of Architectural and
Engineering Examiners

Joe Damons, Plan Reviewer
Codes Enforcement
Tennessee Department of Commerce and
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Randy Davis, Executive Director
Tennessee Baptist Convention

Vicki Davis, Tennessee Chapter
Building Owners and Managers Association

John Duncan, Manager
Property and Casualty Division
Tennessee Department of Commerce and
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Nicole Dutton, Librarian
National Fire Protection Association

Leigh Ferguson, Assistant General Counsel
Tennessee Department of Commerce and
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Dave Finger, Director
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Mary Beth Gribble, Legislative Liaison
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Timothy Hill, State Representative
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Rich Walke
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Underwriters Laboratories

Chuck Walker, Fire Chief
Ashland City, Tennessee

Jason Webb, Director
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National Fire Sprinkler Association

Gary West, Assistant Commissioner
Fire Prevention Division
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Insurance

Trey Wheeler, Vice-President
American Institute of Architects

Tommy White, Fire Marshall
Eastern Division Representative
Tennessee Fire Safety Inspectors
Association

Bill Young, Executive Vice-President
Associated General Contractors of
Tennessee

Representatives of state fire marshal's
offices or building codes departments in
each state.

Appendix A

SENATE BILL 1749
By Niceley

HOUSE BILL 1649

By Hill T

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 56, Chapter 19; Title 62, Chapter 32; Title 68, Chapter 102 and Title 68, Chapter 120, relative to fire sprinklers in places of worship.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 68, Chapter 102, Part 1, is amended by adding the following language as a new section:

68-102-154.

(a) For purposes of this section, unless the context otherwise requires:

(1) "Building code" means any nationally recognized code that has been adopted by reference by the state or local government, or any code that has been implemented by ordinance or resolution by a local government;

(2) "Place of worship" means any building that is:

(A) Approved, or meeting criteria for approval, by the state board of equalization for property tax exemption pursuant to § 67-5-212, based on ownership and use of the building by a religious institution; and

(B) Utilized on a regular basis by the religious institution as the site of congregational services, rites, or activities communally undertaken for the purpose of worship; and

(2) "Water supply" means water supplied by a public or private utility water main, gravity tank, pressure tank, reservoir, or well.

(b) Notwithstanding any law, rule, building code, or fire safety standard to the contrary, a fire protection sprinkler system shall not be required in a single-story building located in an unincorporated area that meets all of the following requirements:

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- (1) Is a place of worship;
- (2) Has a capacity of no more than four hundred (400) persons;
- (3) Does not have a water supply located on the property;
- (4) Has a minimum of two (2) exits, plus one (1) additional exit for every two thousand five hundred square feet (2,500 sq. ft.) or portion thereof over four thousand five hundred square feet (4,500 sq. ft.);
- (5) Has a fire alarm system; and
- (6) Has fixed seating for at least two hundred fifty (250) persons.

(c) It is the intent of the general assembly that this section shall apply retroactively to any place of worship built on or after July 1, 2012.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring

it.