

Reference #
15737397



DENVER CITY COUNCIL

I am giving testimony on / Tema sobre el que le gustaría comentar

25-0735: An ordinance amending Section 10-16 of the DRMC to adopt the 2024 series of national building and fire codes and to substantially reduce the volume of Denver-specific amendments. / Una ordenanza que modifica la Sección 10-16 del Código Municipal de Denver para adoptar la serie 2024 de códigos nacionales de construcción e incendios y reducir sustancialmente el volumen de enmiendas específicas de Denver.

First Name / Nombre

Robert

Last Name / Apellido

Merlino

I am a resident of: / Soy residente del:

Council District 7 / Distrito 7

I am / Estoy

Against the item / en contra del artículo

My testimony: / Mi testimonio:

I am a homeowner / resident of District 7, a parent of children attending Lincoln Elementary, and a fire safety professional serving Denver and communities across Colorado. I care deeply about the safety and well-being of our city.

While the current proposed building code is certainly a significant improvement from past versions, many areas of building code that could have been improved remain status quo.

The currently proposed Denver Building code has amendments to section R309.1. The proposed amendment removes the requirement in the International Residential Building Code for fire sprinkler systems to be installed in all new townhouses. This requirement has been in the International Residential Building Code since 2009.

I urge city council to reject the current version of building code unless the amendments to section R309.1 are removed. Adopting IRC Section R309, which mandates fire sprinklers in newly constructed townhouses, is a critical step for the City and County of Denver to enhance fire safety, reduce property loss, and align with proven practices both nationally and within Colorado. As a former homeowner of a townhouse unit in Denver I have first hand knowledge of some of the potential fire safety challenges with these structures.

Nationally, residential fires account for a significant majority of fire-related casualties and damages:

92% of civilian fire deaths occur in residential buildings.

49% of these deaths are in one- and two-family dwellings.

The presence of sprinklers reduces fire death risk by 89% and fire-related property damage by approximately 70%.

80% of fire deaths occur in homes without sprinklers.

Modern furnishings can cause flashover in under 4 minutes, leaving occupants minimal time to escape.

In Colorado, the situation mirrors national trends. In 2023, the state reported 4.1 deaths and 26.2 injuries per 1,000 residential structure fires, compared to national averages of 5.8 deaths and 19.7 injuries, respectively.

Colorado leads by example and demonstrates a proactive approach to residential fire safety, with 62 communities implementing some form of residential sprinkler requirements. Notably, 32 communities specifically mandate sprinklers in townhouses, including: Fort Collins, Boulder, Lakewood, Westminster, Pueblo, Lafayette, Erie, Estes Park, Golden, and Broomfield.

Additionally, counties such as Larimer, Boulder, Adams, El Paso, Summit, and Pitkin have enacted requirements ranging from all townhouses to thresholds based on square footage or specific fire district locations.

Implementing residential fire sprinkler requirements is both economically feasible and administratively consistent:

Cost Efficiency: Residential sprinkler systems cost approximately 2% of a home's total value.

Builder Incentives: Builders can offset costs through IRC provisions, such as reducing fire ratings

from 2-hour to 1-hour, eliminating floor separations, and other infrastructure trade-offs.

Profit Margins Maintained: With builder profit margins averaging 20% of project costs, the inclusion of sprinklers at a 2% cost does not jeopardize profitability.

Insurance Premium Reductions: Homeowners may benefit from insurance premium reductions ranging from 5% to 15% due to the decreased risk associated with sprinkler systems.

Code Consistency: The International Building Code (IBC) already mandates fire sprinklers in all townhouse-style buildings within its scope. Adopting IRC Section R309 aligns the residential code with the IBC, ensuring uniformity and simplifying enforcement.

Pre-Construction Necessity: Given that townhouses are often constructed before individual units are sold, incorporating sprinklers during initial construction is essential, as retrofitting is more complex and costly.

With proven effectiveness, reasonable costs, and established precedent in over 60 Colorado communities, adopting IRC Section R309 as written—without amendment—is a straightforward and life-saving measure. Denver has the opportunity to close a known fire safety gap in townhouse construction with a requirement that is both nationally recognized and locally validated.

I look forward to your leadership on these important issues. Thank you for your time and commitment to our community.

Finish Time

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