

Codes and Standards



Create safer communities by implementing and enforcing codes and standards as created by a national consensus process, especially in the WUI and under-served and vulnerable populations in rural and urban areas; and provide affordable and fire-safe housing.

Issue

State and local governments are responsible for promoting the use and enforcement of current codes and standards. The federal government can help by incentivizing compliance and providing funding to local jurisdictions for code implementation, inspection, and enforcement. This will increase fire and life safety in our communities, especially in the wildland-urban interface and among under-served and vulnerable populations.

Impact Areas

Model building codes improve building resilience to natural disasters and save \$11 for every \$1 invested.¹ All nationally recognized modern building and fire codes require the use of life-saving technology, like smoke alarms, carbon monoxide alarms, and automatic fire sprinkler systems.

Nearly a million households live in public housing units in the United States², and fire safety improvements in public housing must receive heightened attention. In 1992, Congress passed the Federal Fire Safety Act (15 USC 2227), requiring newly constructed multi-family housing units to have fire sprinklers. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimates

that approximately 570,000 multi-family public housing units are in their inventory that were constructed before the sprinkler requirement.³ A significant portion of these units lack the protection offered by fire sprinklers.

In buildings with automatic fire sprinkler systems, the civilian fire death rate is 89 percent lower than in non-



sprinklered buildings and the injury rate is 27 percent lower. Furthermore, property damage decreases significantly in buildings protected by fire sprinklers.⁴ Investments must be made in retrofitting public housing with fire sprinkler systems.

Nearly three out of five home fire deaths are caused by fires in properties without smoke alarms or smoke alarms that failed to operate.⁵ In 2022, Congress passed the Public and Federally Assisted Housing Fire Safety Act⁶, requiring public housing agencies to install smoke alarms with 10-year non-replaceable batteries where hardwire alarms are not already installed. It is critical for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to ensure public housing authorities are complying with this requirement and should expedite the process by providing resources to public housing authorities to either retrofit housing units with hardwired smoke alarms or install tamper-resistant long-life battery-powered smoke alarms.

More Information ▶



¹ Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves: 2019 Report (National Institute for Building Sciences; December 1, 2019)

² U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, Office of Public and Indian Housing

³ Letter from Sarah J. Brundage, General Deputy Assistant Secretary for Congressional & Intergovernmental Relations, Department of Housing & Urban Development to Senator Tina Smith (MN), Chair of the Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, & Community Development, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs (June 4, 2021).

⁴ US Experience with Fire Sprinklers (NFPA; October 2021)

⁵ Smoke Alarms in US Home Fires (NFPA; February 2021)

⁶ The legislation was included in Title VI of the Fiscal Year 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act (PL 117-328).