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December 29, 2010

Chief Tay Robertson
President, Oregon Fire Chiefs' Association
727 Center Street N.E.
Suite 300
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chief Robertson,

On December 10, 2010, the League of Oregon Cities' Board of Directors passed a motion encouraging individual cities to work with the Oregon Fire Chiefs' Association (OFCA) on the important issue of residential fire sprinkler systems in new homes.

The League shares your organization's concerns about public safety and believes that residential flow-through fire sprinkler systems can save lives, reduce property damage caused by fire and decrease water usage during fire suppression efforts.

However, the League also believes that the myriad of issues involved with residential fire sprinkler systems – particularly concerns regarding elevated peak water usage and system development charges associated with the larger water meters necessitated by fire sprinkler systems – are best handled at the local level.

Larger water meters will enable households to consume a higher volume of water, since water pressure will be less affected by the simultaneous use of multiple water fixtures. Increase water usage, aggregated over many residences, could result in elevated "peak use," which generally occurs over the summer months. Water providers must plan according to these peak needs, and must build supply, treatment, storage and distribution systems that will meet this elevated demand. Slight changes to the peak demand could result in cities not being able to provide adequate water to customers or for emergency purposes. Increased peak use could also hasten the need for new water supply, treatment, storage and distribution infrastructure that has not yet been budgeted, and often takes years to plan, finance and construct.

Moreover, Oregon law specifically dictates the methodology local governments must employ and the considerations that must be taken into account to equitably and transparently determine system development charges. Oregon statute also specifies that the collected funds must be spent on capital projects, and cannot be used to cover maintenance or operations expenses. The process

to determine system development charges is open to the public, and objections to any charges are entitled to a public hearing (ORS 223.297–ORS 223-314).

For these reasons, we strongly encourage your organization to approach individual cities about fire sprinkler requirements, and any concerns you have regarding system development charges. Local officials know their water systems best, and will best be able to discuss with you their respective systems.

We will bring the important issue of residential fire sprinkler systems to the attention of local officials by informing cities of the Board's motion through an article in our weekly LOC Bulletin, which is emailed to city officials throughout the state. We are also publishing a toolkit on our website that will provide city officials with background information on the issue, as well as codes from several cities who have passed fire sprinkler requirements and/or waived or reduced system development charges for the larger water meters necessitated by such systems.

The League remains, however, firmly opposed to any statewide mandate regarding fire sprinklers and system development charges.

We thank you for your time, and look forward to continuing to work with you on important public safety issues.

Warm regards,

Mike McCauley
President, League of Oregon Cities