



ONTARIO HOMES FOR SPECIAL NEEDS ASSOCIATION

40 HOLLY STREET, SUITE 404, TORONTO, ON M4S 3C3
T: 1-888-440-4966 | T: 416-488-4945 | F: 416-922-4295
WWW.OHSNA.ORG

Ontario Homes for Special Needs Association

*Response to the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services
Consultation on Fire Safety for Vulnerable Residents in Ontario*

March 28, 20011



For more information please contact: info@ohsna.org



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RESPONDENT INFORMATION

Your name: **Connie Evans**

Your organization/association: **Ontario Homes for Special Needs Association**

Your title: **Vice-President, Homes for Special Care**

Are you authorized to speak on behalf of the organization: **Yes**



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PREVENTION/PUBLIC EDUCATION

Question 1:

What types of fire prevention initiatives or measures should be implemented to improve fire safety in occupancies housing vulnerable Ontarians?

- 1. Thorough, accurate, timely inspections of fire systems and equipment by a certified company**
- 2. Homeowners/operators take responsibility of ongoing maintenance of systems**
- 3. Fire drills undertaken at all hours, not only during daylight hours, ie. Midnight, 3am, etc.**

Please indicate which initiatives or measures you identified should be considered the highest priority for improving fire safety in these occupancies.

Suggestions prioritized accordingly above and a requirement of all homes under our annual HSC licence and Domiciliary Licence.

Question 2:

The *Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997*, requires municipalities to establish public education and fire prevention programs within their communities.

Municipalities are currently meeting this obligation

Strongly disagree

Please explain how municipalities are or are not currently meeting this obligation.

Currently in most regions no supportive educational programs are offered in these settings. Annual inspections are the only structures in place. There are the very few exceptions, i.e. Kitchener.

Please provide suggestions on how municipalities can more effectively meet this obligation.

Fire departments should be available to observe drills and offer education as per their guidelines and obligations.

Question 3:

Residents have a role to play in terms of safety and prevention.

Strongly agree

What role do residents play in terms of fire safety and prevention? Please explain your response.

Residents participate in monthly drills to enhance their understanding of best practices to be followed in the event of a real fire.



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PROTECTION AND INSPECTIONS

Question 4:

Municipalities establish the level of fire protection services, including fire safety inspections, based on the needs and circumstances within the community. Fire safety inspections are not prescribed in *the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997*.

The current framework/practice for fire safety inspections by municipal fire department is sufficient.

Neither agree or disagree

Please explain your response and provide suggestions for improvement (if applicable).

Fire regulations are subject to different interpretations and leads to a lack of universal understanding. The guidelines are ambiguous and require a necessary concrete methodology to follow. If someone challenges a fire safety recommendation, there is no appeal process or accountability by local fire departments. Currently in place, a fire safety committee and Ontario fire marshal's office, which offer rulings that the local fire department can ultimately still dismiss.

Question 5:

Establishing a prescribed frequency of fire safety inspections for occupancies housing vulnerable residents is an important tool for fire safety and prevention.

Agree

How often should occupancies housing vulnerable residents be inspected? Please explain your response.

Annually by certified individuals.

Continually or ongoing by home operator with a log book demonstrating this maintenance.

LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY TOOLS

Question 6:

Owners/operators are currently complying with the regulatory requirement of the Ontario Fire Code.

Strongly agree

Please explain your response.

The OHSNA requires that all members have regulatory inspections with the Fire Code. Examples of above and beyond include certificates for Fire Extinguisher Training, door closures on bedroom doors, and posted room numbers on all doors which are visible in darkness, as smoke rises. Some also post notices on bedroom doors to indicate room has been checked and vacant during drills and emergencies.



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Question 7:

What types of responsibilities should owners/operators have with respect to fire safety in their buildings, which are not current requirements in the Ontario Fire Code?

Listed above

Question 8:

Existing Ontario Fire Code requirements for care and care and treatment occupancies are sufficient.

Neither agree or disagree

Please explain how the existing Ontario Fire Code requirements for vulnerable occupancies are or are not sufficient.

Our fire regulations are sufficient. However, the criteria and definition of the clients in residential care facilities is unclear in these regulations, i.e. what is the definition of “care” in the above statement. The criteria for clients currently in homes is attached. The definition of care needs to properly reflect particularities of clients, both physically and cognitively.

ENFORCEMENT AND PENALTIES

Question 9:

Enforcement of the Ontario Fire Code is done by municipal fire departments.

The enforcement for existing Fire Code requirements, including Retrofit, is adequate.

Strongly agree

Please explain your response.

The regulations being followed have proven to be both safe and adequate for the clients we service.

Question 10:

How should enforcement of the Ontario Fire Code be improved to ensure increased compliance (if applicable)?

N/A Adequate

Question 11:

Increased penalties for convictions on Ontario Fire Code violations will increase compliance by owners/operators.

Strongly disagree

Please explain your response.

Penalties and convictions are already identified and clearly covered within our current regulations.



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IMPLEMENTATION

Question 12:

The following features should be required on a Retrofit basis in existing buildings (housing vulnerable resident) constructed before 1998, through the Ontario Fire Code. Please check off all that apply:

- Zone fire separation
- Self-closing hardware for suite doors
- Remote connection for fire alarm system
- Emergency lighting upgrades
- Voice communication for buildings more than 3 storeys high
- Emergency power upgrades for buildings more than 3 storeys high
- Other

Please explain your rationale.

Any of the above are admirable examples but would require significant resources and at present time no funding exists to allow this implementation.

Question 13:

If the implementation of all or some of the fire safety features/retrofits listed in question 12 become mandatory for existing occupancies housing vulnerable residents, there are some occupancies that should be exempt from this requirement.

Strongly agree

The impact would most certainly lead to home closures which in turn would impact the housing for the vulnerable population in Ontario.

Question 14:

If you believe should be exemptions for one occupancies, please identify:

- a) The type of occupancies that should be exempt from this requirement? And
- b) What these exemptions should be based on (i.e. building size, number of storeys, level/type of care provided, age of building, etc)?

a) Our home settings are safe and the above suggestions although useful, are not necessarily to provide a safe environment according to the definition of the care we provide.

b) N/A

Question 15:

There will be operational impacts on owners/operators and residents associated with the implementation of the fire safety features/retrofits described in question 12.

Strongly agree

Please describe any anticipated impacts on both occupancies and residents.

Again, the above suggestion for change are costly with only marginal benefits.



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Question 16:

Requirements for fire sprinklers were adopted through the Building Code for new construction in 1998.

The Ontario Fire Code should require installation of fire sprinklers in existing occupancies constructed before 1998 and housing vulnerable occupants.

Strongly disagree

Please explain your response.

Fire sprinkler systems have been proven to save buildings, not necessarily lives. Thus, the cost does not support this regulation.

Question 17:

If the installation of fire sprinklers becomes mandatory for existing occupancies housing vulnerable residents, there are some occupancies that should be exempt from this requirement.

Strongly agree

Question 18:

If you believe there should be exemptions for some occupancies, please identify:

- a) The type of occupancies that should be exempt from this requirement?; and,
- b) What these exemptions should be based on (i.e. building size, number of storeys, level/type of care provided, age of building, etc.)?

The exemptions would be Dom Homes and HSC as this regulation is not necessary for the client needs and criteria. The financial impact on rural homes, not on town water, would be astounding and unattainable with current funding.

Question 19:

There will be operational impacts on owners/operators and residents associated with the installation of fire sprinklers.

Strongly agree

Please describe any anticipated impacts on both occupancies and residents.

- 1. As noted, the financial impact to homes that do not have access to a water supply**
- 2. Damage due to false discharge**
- 3. Due to the particularities of the clients serviced, these systems could potentially be discharged inadvertently for non-fire related reasons (ie behaviour).**

Question 20:

There will be financial impacts on occupancies associated with the implementation of fire sprinklers and other fire safety features/retrofits.

Strongly agree

Please describe anticipated impacts.

Discussed above



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Question 21:

Installation of fire sprinklers and other fire safety features/retrofits in existing occupancies is a significant undertaking with corresponding financial and operational impacts on both the operators and residents. How much time would reasonably be required for owners/operators of existing occupancies to install fire sprinklers and other fire safety features?

0-5 years

5-10 years

10-15 years

Other/Never XXX

Please explain your response.

Never at current per diem rates. We would need full financial assistance to undertake these installations.

Question 22:

Do you have any other experience, comments or suggestions regarding fire safety and prevention for occupancies housing vulnerable Ontarians that you would like to provide?

We strongly suggest consistent enforcement and close scrutiny of the guidelines disseminated across municipalities to prevent different interpretations of regulations.

ADDITIONAL DATA

Questions 23-24 should only be answered by municipalities and owners/operators of occupancies. If you are answering question:

a) on behalf of a municipality, please respond to questions 23 – 28.

b) as an owner or operator of an occupancy housing vulnerable persons, please respond to question 29-24.

Question 29

OHSNA is a voluntary, non-profit organization representing Domiciliary Hostels, and Homes for Special Care. The Association has 100 member homes that represent approximately 35% of the beds in the province.

Question 30-31 – not applicable

Question 32 (four part question):

1. Do you have any direct experience with installing fire sprinklers in an existing care and care and treatment occupancy/building?

Yes, as I attempted to add an addition to my existing home to allow for single bedroom units. These renovations would now subject my home to retrofit and the cost made it impossible. Therefore improvements to homes cannot be made retrofit regulations stipulate ie. Sprinkler systems and being a rural home, I have no access to water systems—cost; and, hallways need to be retrofitted to the *Accessibility Act* which indicates the



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lack of understanding re the type of clients we service; as a criteria for admission is that they are ambulatory with no assistive devices.

2. What are the challenges?

As above

3. If available, what were the costs?

Retrofit \$150,000

4. What size of building was involved?

Approximately 2,000 square feet (addition size)

Question 33:

Do you have any direct experience with upgrading an existing care and care and treatment occupancy building with fire safety upgrades?

As discussed in question 32.

Question 34:

1. Is your occupancy regularly inspected by the fire department? How often is it inspected?

Yes, annually

2. When was the last inspection?

November 2010

3. Is this the right frequency? If not, should there be an increase or decrease in the frequency of inspections?

Yes, this is adequate as monthly drills and maintenance are offered by home operators.

Appendix:

Homes for Special Care HSC Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Queen Street Program CAMH

The HSC program operating out of the Queen Street Site of the Center for Addiction and Mental Health has 434 licensed residential beds in 24 homes. The majority of these homes are located north of Toronto in York Region, 3 are in Peel Region and 1 in Toronto. These are group home settings with an average of 17 beds. Most are shared bedrooms with some singles.

The homes are licensed annually following formal inspection by Fire and Public Health inspectors plus an environmental inspection by the HSC Community Support Workers (CSWs).

In addition, the CSWs have the responsibility and mandate to closely monitor these homes. This is accomplished by frequent random visits at which time any issues or concerns are discussed with both the residents and the operator.

The HSC program is operated under the Ministry of Health. It was established to provide basic high support for chronic but stable psychiatric clients. It is a voluntary program and residents are free to leave it at any time.

CRITERIA: For Acceptance

1. Ability to handle self care.
2. Clinical symptoms are stable and client no longer requires active in-patient treatment
3. Client must be medication compliant
4. The client is able to get along with others without being disruptive in the home milieu
5. Clients who are verbally abusive may be considered
6. Clients who have been physically aggressive in the past, will be assessed in terms of history and severity of such incidents
7. Client does require community living skills such as travelling, working, etc.
8. Clients require some level of 24 hour supervision and support and, at the discretion of the operator, the level of support needed can be met by the home.
9. Client chooses to live in a residential setting which may be outside the Toronto area.
10. Client may be considered for a different ESC home if previous placement did not work out
11. The decision whether or not to accept a client into the HSC program is made by the HSC CSWs. The CSW will also determine which homes are the most suitable in conjunction with the HSC operator.

CRITERIA: For Exclusion

1. Developmentally handicapped as primary diagnosis
2. Acquired brain injury/organic brain syndrome
3. Recent history of being a fire hazard, careless smoking
4. Intrusive behaviours which will disrupt the orderly operation of the home
5. Recent history of poor impulse control which would exceed HSC supervisory capacity
6. Recent history of a potential for violent acting out behaviour
7. All clients must be ambulatory with no assistive devices
8. Client requires 24-hour nursing care or a locked or secure setting
9. Clients who are not self-sufficient in their daily medical treatments