



People Helping People Build a Safer World™

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May 19, 2005

Mr. William Grosshandler
Station Investigation
NIST
100 Bureau Drive, Stop 8660
Gaithersburg, MD

Dear Mr. Grosshandler:

I'm writing you today as Chairman of the International Fire Code Council. We are a group of seasoned fire service professionals seeking to enhance the overall fire safety of the United States and beyond. Our core mission is to enhance the engineering, enforcement, and education aspects of the fire prevention arm of the fire service.

Please consider this correspondence a formal comment on the report recently released of your study of the Station Fire in Rhode Island. Overall, the study appears to be well planned and executed, with several positive recommendations for improvement in our fire prevention defenses.

Each time a major loss like this occurs, we hear from political leaders, fire service leaders, and attorneys that we must take action to assure that this "never happens again." Immediately thereafter, the attacks begin. "Blame the regulations – fix the code!"; "The regulator wasn't competent (or some other criticism)"; or "The owners put money ahead of safety – they are to blame." While each of these arguments may or may not have merit in any given case (usually all three come into play), there is a very important piece of this puzzle that continues to be ignored – that is, the fact that the fire prevention mission in this country is simply not a priority for our elected and appointed leadership. Fire Prevention offices are historically under-funded, under-trained, and, overall, under-supported. It is rare for an elected official to provide vocal support for fire inspectors, building inspectors, and the like. Rather, as these dedicated professionals attempt to apply the regulations that the political leaders have enacted, they are deemed "barriers" to business development and operation.

What this country needs, and a recommendation your report should include, is for the leadership of each political subdivision in this country – at every level – village, city, county, state, and federal – to take a stand against the dangerous operation of businesses, whether the business be manufacturing, entertainment, retail, or some other. Further, these leaders should assess their fire prevention operations and assure that the enforcers are well trained, that there are enough inspectors to conduct the appropriate number of inspections in their jurisdiction,

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and that the leadership has the political will to support the fire prevention efforts when some business person decides that the regulations should not apply to him.

Without this change in culture, all the codes in the world, and all the science in the world, will not change the current situation. Rather, we will continue to see massive losses of life and property until we, as a nation, say "enough is enough."

Thank you for the opportunity to comment; I stand ready and available for further discussions, if you so desire.

Sincerely,



Tom Lariviere
Chairman
International Fire Code Council

cc: Don Carcieri, Governor
State of Rhode Island