

# N.C. home builder promotes sprinklers; firefighters' campaign raised awareness

By Joe Marusak  
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HUNTERSVILLE, N.C. — Huntersville builder Chris Ebel will have his custom home in rural Iredell County finished and decorated for the Parade of Homes in June.

But what he really wants you to see is something that could save your life.

Ebel hadn't thought about putting a sprinkler system in his home, several miles east of I-77 Troutman Exit 42, until his fiancée brought it up because of their proven safety.

As vice president of the Lake Norman Home Builders Association, Ebel will be an important proponent of in-home sprinklers to the builders and homebuyers on the association's annual tour.

Few if any lake area homes have in-door sprinkler systems, local fire officials have told me, and no national builders here offer them as options.

I first wrote about the importance of sprinklers in January. I mentioned how Mooresville Fire Chief Wesley Greene is raising awareness locally and statewide about how sprinkler systems are like having a firefighter in your home 24/7.

I'm glad to report that Greene's department has since partnered with Cornelius-based Our Towns Habitat for Humanity to have sprinkler systems installed in all of the nonprofit agency's future Mooresville homes.

The first went into one on Elm Street three weeks ago, Mooresville Fire Marshal Gary Styers said.

Habitat has widespread community support, so putting sprinklers in Habitat homes is great for raising awareness of the value of sprinklers, he said.

Sprinkler system manufacturers donate their products for the Habitat homes, and firefighters install them.

Floyd Fritz, deputy chief of the Pinehurst Fire Department in Eastern North Carolina,

said he has personally installed sprinkler systems in at least 150 Habitat homes in Moore County since 1996 through a similar partnership.

Like every other homebuilder I've talked with about in-home sprinklers, Ebel is against government mandating them in homes.

Yet he knows the potential return on his upfront investment. "We'll get it back in a 10- to 20-percent reduction on the homeowner's insurance," he said.

A good start would be for builders to offer in-home sprinklers as an option on custom homes, he said. The cost to a 3,000-square-foot custom home is about \$6,750, including labor and materials, Ebel said.

As I chatted with Ebel on the second floor of his 3,600-square-foot home, Lake Norman plumbing contractor Bob Zarybnicky was on a ladder installing pipes for the sprinkler system. Zarybnicky intends to open the lake's first company installing sprinkler systems in new and existing homes.

Concealed mounts will hide the sprinklers. "All you'll see is a little disc on the ceiling," Ebel said.

Fritz, Styers and several other fire officials from across the state watched the installation last week.

Styers thought of Salisbury firefighters Victor Isler and Justin Monroe, who died fighting a fire in a building without sprinklers at Salisbury Millwork on March 7.

He thought of the nine firefighters who died in Charleston, S.C., on June 18 while working to control fires in a sofa warehouse complex that also had no sprinklers.

"Firefighting is an inherently dangerous job," Styers said. "But if you can make that fire smaller, all the better."

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