

Original quote for the often misquoted, “If you can build a better mousetrap...”

If a man has good corn or wood, or boards, or pigs, to sell, or can make better chairs or knives, crucibles or church organs, than anybody else, you will find a broad hard-beaten road to his house, though it be in the woods.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

On a side note, the US Patent Office has over 4,400 patents for mouse traps!

What in the world is a photo-electric smoke detector? ...and why do I need them?

GCNKAA has been working very closely with Vice Mayor Qualls and Councilmember Sittenfeld on the issue of photo-electric smoke detectors being required in rental property. On January 1st of 2013 in the Clifton area, two college students died of smoke inhalation due to a smoldering fire. While there are complicating factors to that situation, including deactivated ionization smoke detectors, the smoke-based fatality is a problem that could most likely be avoided with the use of a photo-electric type of smoke detector. These detectors, according to several university studies, are significantly more effective in picking up smoldering fires. With today's pervasive use of fire retardant materials, most fires actually smolder for a significant amount of time before growing into a flaming-fire. The photo-electric smoke detectors are quicker activating with these smoldering fires and substantially the same in fast burning fires. By utilizing a single sensor photo-electric smoke detector residents may be notified between 2 and 40 minutes earlier, based on university studies.

Due to this technological advantage, members of the Legislative Committee met with, and decided to partner with the City of Cincinnati Fire Department in an effort to help reduce smoke related fatalities in Cincinnati. Cincinnati City Council passed an ordinance on Wednesday February 27th, 2013 to require photo-electric smoke detectors in rental properties. Buildings with less than 12 units have 6 months to install one photo-electric smoke detector in a bedroom, or outside of a bedroom between contiguous bedrooms. 13+ unit buildings are to install the photo-electric smoke detectors at turn-over and have them all in place within 2 years. (Personally, I am also placing one at the top of stairwells.)

The City's initial plan required all rental property to have photo-electric smoke detectors in place within 90 days. In discussing the logistics and financial impact, as well as the likelihood of incident, smaller buildings were asked to finish the process more quickly, as student and university related fatalities have been more significantly impacted. We are working with vendors and manufacturers alike in addressing the substantial need for the Cincinnati region. For perspective, the common ionization smoke detector costs approximately \$4.95 (Home Depot) and the basic single sensor photo-electric smoke detector costs from \$10.99 (Meijer in Oakley—prepay bulk orders) to \$13.95 with most other suppliers. Home Depot and HD Supply (Association Members) are working on pricing in the \$9.00 range. First Alert, BRK and Kidde are the main manufacturers. (Please keep in mind when purchasing that Kidde has lobbied against our industry several times.) As new pricing and bulk purchase options become available we will post them on the website and provide additional notification.

There will be an annual certification that the detectors are working. The process for this will most likely be the posting of a self-signed and dated certificate in an area by a fire extinguisher or boiler certificate at the property.

Ionization Detectors: typically these are disabled at least 20% of the time due to nuisance (false) alarms. While the City still encourages their use, ironically near the kitchen where they are most likely to inadvertently go off, you are not required to place or remove them. However, please consider that ALL smoke alarms expire after 10 years. If the smoke alarm does not have a date stamped on it, it most likely predates the 10 year expiration and will be considered “expired” by fire inspectors in any region. Ionization detectors will often have an atomic symbol on them for their (exceptionally small) radioactive ingredient, while photo-electrics will typically have “P” in a square stamped on the case. 90%+ of all detectors currently being used are ionization.

Lithium batteries: These long-life batteries can help minimize the maintenance required for battery change outs and reduce the time it takes to perform annual certification. Most lithium batteries currently last about 6 years. 9-volt Lithium batteries are less likely to be “removed” by tenants as there are fewer uses outside of smoke alarms for this style of battery. Longer lasting batteries are expected to enter the market later this year – updates will be announced as they become available. Many detectors have pin near the battery case which can help deny or delay a tenant access to the battery.

Combo-Units: Please note the use of the term “single sensor” is not without purpose. There are combo-units that include both ionization and photo-electric sensors. However, these combo units consistently react slower than single sensor units in various tests, and are NOT recommended. To be brief, they are more costly and less effective.

Talking Trash:

The Cincinnati City budget (passed in December 2012) included a proposed 10% tax increase on all commercial trash removal in the city through the use of a “Franchise Fee” on solid waste haulers. We expect this increase to be passed on directly to commercial users, including multi-family users. Therefore, we have been developing legal options that may need to be utilized if a settlement is not reached before the May 1st implementation.

In addition, the City has been picking up numerous smaller properties’ trash even though they are larger than 4 units. This is expected to be fully addressed and all loopholes closed by October of this year. If you have inadvertently been benefitting from City pick up for the past 20 years, please start the process of looking into one of our vendors before it becomes a last minute crisis.

More to follow...

State of Taxes:

With the Governor's budget seeking to grow government spending by 6-24% (depending on how you count it) new revenue (taxes) need to be captured. The aside from the severance tax on natural gas stagnating a potential growth industry in the state, the Governor has sought to expand sales taxes to include contract workers, management fees, and coin operated laundry, among a variety of other oxen getting gored. Ironically, three areas of exception were noted: Food, Medicine, and Housing. Local associations are working with the Ohio Apartment Association in an effort to educate legislators on the need include our three "oxen" in the Housing Exemption Tent. Please, if at all possible, attend the Legislator Roundtable when it is scheduled in your county – invites will be sent as they are arranged.

My OI' Kentucky Home:

KAA is working on the adoption process for the 2012 International Building Code which requires sprinklers, however the hidden mandate on carbon monoxide alarms may be a bigger issue, as it appears to be retroactive on all apartments due to the "Health & Safety" aspect. More to come on this as we work to address the concern.