

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2010 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1538 (Delegates Olszewski and Weir)
Environmental Matters

**Firehouses - New Construction or Major Renovation - Fire Sprinkler Systems and
Fire Suppression Systems**

This bill requires a county to install a fire sprinkler system in a firehouse when a county constructs a new firehouse or conducts a major renovation of an existing firehouse. By January 1, 2012, each county must conduct a study on the feasibility of installing a fire sprinkler system or other fire suppression system in existing firehouses and report to the General Assembly on the results of the feasibility study.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: Potential significant increase in local expenditures in some jurisdictions from installing fire sprinkler systems in new or renovated firehouse construction; as well as for conducting the required feasibility studies. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: The primary responsibility for meeting Maryland's fire and rescue needs rests at the local level with the 371 organizations identified by the State Fire Marshal. According to the National Fire Protection Association, the majority of firehouses in Maryland are constructed, owned, and operated by local volunteer fire companies. Because they bear the primary responsibility for meeting Maryland's fire and rescue needs, local governments support most of the costs of these services. In

fiscal 2007, county and municipal governments in Maryland spent \$810.5 million on fire protection services. In addition, some costs are defrayed through fundraising efforts of the volunteer fire companies and through federal grants. Additionally, the State provides \$10 million through the Senator William H. Amoss Fire, Rescue, and Ambulance Fund (better known as the Amoss Fund), which is distributed on the basis of a county's share of property tax accounts relative to the statewide total.

Local Fiscal Effect: When constructing or renovating a firehouse some counties may incur additional expenses if required to include a fire sprinkler system. The total impact will depend on whether existing local building codes in the jurisdiction currently require a fire sprinkler system to be installed in such a building and the size of the building.

The additional cost to install a sprinkler system in a new building is estimated to be at least \$6,000. The cost to retrofit an existing firehouse that undergoes a renovation will also vary greatly based on the size and characteristics of the building. The total number of county-owned fire facilities in the State that would be affected by this bill is not known. Counties may incur additional expenses to develop a feasibility study of installing a fire sprinkler system or other fire suppression system in existing firehouses.

Garrett County indicates that retrofitting its firehouses that are not connected to a public water supply will cost \$15,000 and that a feasibility study of existing firehouses will cost an additional \$15,000. Future year costs will be determined by the study. Montgomery County indicates that the bill would have no fiscal impact because the county's firehouses are already equipped with fire sprinkler systems.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Garrett and Montgomery counties, Department of Legislative Services

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mlm/hlb

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