



February 15, 2023

HB769 - Public Safety - Fire Dampers, Smoke Dampers, Combination Fire Smoke Dampers, and Smoke Control Systems

Chairman Barve and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding HB769.

The National Energy Management Institute (NEMI) works with public, private, and government organizations as well as companies nationwide to make environments safer for people in schools, hospitals, and commercial buildings nationwide.

NEMI also creates training and certification opportunities, so consumers know the workers — who assure fire safe safety systems are inspected, verify the indoor air quality in schools, and make sure the heating and air conditioning systems in office buildings are energy efficient — are at the top of their industry and experts in their field. NEMI works with state and federal officials, as subject matter experts (SME), to make sure legislation and safety align, allowing members of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation (SMART) workers and the Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association (SMACNA) to use their training and experience to ensure the safety of building occupants and first responders.

Intent

The overarching goal of HB769 is to ensure the fire safety systems in commercial, industrial, and public buildings in Maryland are safe for the occupants and first responders if there were a fire or smoke event.

Problem

Currently, sprinkler systems, fire alarms, and fire extinguishers are periodically inspected to ensure they are working. However, other components like fire dampers, smoke dampers, and smoke control systems are not clearly subject to inspection and testing requirements.

As an experienced field technician, I can tell you that a significant amount of Fire Life Safety dampers and Smoke Control Systems do not operate as designed. During an event, building occupants depend on these systems and components to function as designed so they can safely exit the building. First responders depend on these same systems and components to safely enter a building during an event.





Unfortunately, the problems with Fire Life Safety dampers and Smoke Control Systems I identified as a field technician have proven to be systematic across the country. In 2021, the University of Maryland Study reviewed over 170,000 fire life safety dampers and found that 53% of dampers in existing buildings needed repairs. The same study reviewed 740 Smoke Control System Projects and found that 41% of Existing Buildings Stairwells required repairs or adjustment.

If any building had less than half of their sprinklers, fire alarms, or fire extinguishers in working order, that building would be evacuated and considered unfit for occupancy until repairs were made. Why would we treat fire and smoke dampers and smoke control systems any differently? Often the reason these items are overlooked is because they are installed above the ceilings or in mechanical spaces outside of view of most of the public, unlike fire sprinkler systems and fire extinguishers.

Solution

HB769 would bring Maryland in line with the approved standards of the National Fire Protection Association which are already part of the Maryland Fire Prevention Code. HB769 ensures that technicians performing the work are qualified by an internationally recognized certification, accredited under ISO/IEC 17024. This accreditation gives assurance to the state and municipal inspectors that the life safety testing and inspections have been done in accordance with the applicable codes, adopted standards, and manufacturer's instructions.

Legislation

The proposed solution that is outlined in this bill is not unique, in fact many other states and municipalities have adopted similar legislation or ordinances; New Mexico passed SB143, Washington State passed HB2701, Nevada passed AB297, Illinois passed HB2408, and Delaware passed SB208. In addition, Fire Safety Legislation has passed in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and a dozen counties and municipalities in Ohio. This year similar bills are being introduced in Alaska, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Oregon.

Thank you for your time and your attention to this matter of immense importance to the public's safety. I would be happy to provide further information to the committee if desired, my contact information is below.

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