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Tougher safety rules to stay for new homes in N.C.

By: Johnny Chappell



RALEIGH - The state Building Code Council voted unanimously for a tougher regulation Tuesday, despite heavy pressure from home builders who complained it would cost too much.

Fire prevention experts say arc fault circuit interrupters, or AFCIs, can sense house fires before they start and save lives in the process. State law required AFCIs only in bedrooms until last year, when the Building Code Council decided to mandate them in most rooms.

However, home builders who say AFCIs are too expensive pressured the council to reverse the ruling, which may have happened had Gov. Bev Perdue not stepped in.

"I strongly believe we should not roll back important advances in fire prevention and consumer safety," Perdue wrote in a letter Perdue sent the Building Code Council.

Council members said Perdue's comments had an impact on the decision.

"The governor weighed in," said Building Code Council chairman Dan Tingen. "She indicated that she thought safety was first. The council agreed with what she proposed."

But Tingen, who's also a home builder, says the devices add about \$200 to the cost of an average sized home, and are just another way home builders feel nickled and dimed.

"Well, we are. It's what happens every year," Tingen said. "I could probably come up with four or five items that could easily add \$10,000 to \$15,000 to an average home in North Carolina, and that's what the council has to look at."

Aside from the cost, those who opposed the stronger regulations argued that the technology simply wasn't good enough. But a state official told News 14 Carolina that out of 40,000 of the new devices installed this year, less than half of 1 percent had been returned.

"It's important because a lot of fires start in rooms other than bedrooms," said electrical engineer and Building Code Council member Kim Reitterer. She calls AFCIs crucial protection that often stop fires before they start.

"From braided extension cords, things like that. There are wires in attics, wires in light fixtures all over the house, and those cause fires," Reitterer said.