

FIRE SAFETY

Americans More Concerned Now About Structure Fires

NewsUSA

(NU) - The horrifying images of the fire at a Rhode Island nightclub have heightened Americans' concerns about fire safety, according to the results of a new national survey.

A survey of 1,000 American adults, commissioned by the National Concrete Masonry Association, shows more than 61 percent of Americans say they are more worried about fire in public and commercial buildings because of what they've heard and read about recent fires.

"Recent fire tragedies have raised a very serious red flag about how well buildings are designed, constructed, operated and maintained to protect the lives of occupants," said Gene Corley, senior vice president of Construction Technology Laboratories and head of the team that analyzed the design implications, damage and mechanics of the collapse of the World Trade Center.

What do Americans believe can be done to make buildings safer? According to the survey, 85 percent believe that stricter building codes for public and commercial buildings would improve fire safety.

Additionally, 47 percent identified building code and fire code officials as the people most responsible for making sure buildings are constructed to prevent fires and to help save lives when fire strikes. Owners ranked second at 26 percent, followed by designers and builders.

Americans also are willing to pay more for fire safety. Seventy-nine percent want safer, less com-

bustible materials used in buildings, even if it means increased construction costs and higher prices passed on to consumers.

To provide the best protection and greatest opportunity for occupants to escape a fire, NCMA recommends that codes for buildings require a balanced design made up of three key elements: fire detection, fire suppression and fire containment.

Fire detection includes the installation of smoke detectors and fire alarms. Active fire suppression includes the use of sprinkler systems. Fire containment includes fire barriers, fire walls and exterior walls built of noncombustible fire resistant materials such as concrete masonry.

"Unfortunately, today's new model of building codes and fire codes has strayed significantly from the balanced design approach to fire safety," Corley said.

Noncombustible concrete masonry construction can reduce or eliminate the spread of fire and provide additional protection and time for occupants to exit and for fire and emergency medical personnel to conduct rescue operations, Corley said.

Corley encourages code officials across the nation to participate in making building codes more fire safe and recognize the importance of using noncombustible fire containment construction such as concrete masonry as a strong foundation for a balanced design approach to fire safe buildings.

Consumers can write to their congressman to express concern by e-mail to www.ncma.org/fire.