

# LOCAL NEWS

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## Sprinkler splash-back

### House 'non-sprinklered'; concerns raised about extent of problem

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The Telegram

As the province's fire commissioner embarks on a review of fire and life safety issues in public health buildings, The Telegram has learned yet another facility is operating in the heart of St. John's without the protection of a sprinkler system.

The Association for Co-operative Community Living, Education and Support Services (ACCESS) House on Empire Avenue in St. John's is listed as being a "transitional housing service for people who face challenges in maintaining an independent lifestyle, due to the effects of mental illness."

A spokesman for Municipal and Provincial Affairs confirmed that ACCESS House has no sprinkler system, but that one would be installed "in the near future."

"Eastern Health is in the process of tendering the installation," the spokesman said. "The Office of the Fire Commissioner has followed up on the concern and considers the impending installation as satisfactory."

The facility was renovated - thanks in large part to the financial support of the Rotary Club of St. John's - and re-opened in November 2002.

The ACCESS program takes referrals from across the province, providing accommodation for up to 11 individuals on a year-round basis.

Opposition Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones raised the sprinkler question in the House of Assembly throughout last week.

"We've been asking is there any other facilities, and then you find out about places like ACCESS House that are completely left off the list. (ACCESS House) has never been up for discussion," she said.

Jones said the concern she has is that the surface has only yet been scratched when it comes to a lack of sprinklers in government-run facilities.

"Government has been asked on numerous occasions to give us a list of public buildings that they own and operate that are not up to standard," she said. "It seems like on a regular basis we are adding to that list."

"We need to have some full disclosure around this ... and we need to know when and how they are going to address those needs."

On Friday, Municipal and Provincial Affairs Minister Dave Denine issued a statement saying that the fire commissioner has been directed to conduct assessments of 10 health facilities identified as being "non-sprinklered."

A report is expected within 30 days.

ACCESS House, because it is slated to have sprinklers installed at some point in the future, is not on the list.

Denine also stated that the Dr. Walter Templeman Health Centre on Bell Island had already been identified as needing a sprinkler system, even though the fire commissioner's assessment of the facility "does not identify any immediate fire and life safety dangers to staff or patients."

#### ***Danger not identified***

As for the Dr. W. H. Newhook Community Health Centre in Whitbourne, Denine said that facility would not be getting a sprinkler system because the fire commissioner "did not identify any immediate danger to staff or patients."

The province said the assessments of the other facilities in the province would include "a site visit, review of emergency and evacuation procedures, check of alarm and fire response systems, review of staff training, and interviews with appropriate staff."

The department spokesman noted many of the facilities in question complied with appropriate safety codes when they were originally built.

"Essentially, just because a building does not have a sprinkler system installed does not necessarily deem it unsafe for staff or

patients," the spokesman said. "Other provisions, such as emergency plans and evacuation procedures may be in place, as well as the specific design of buildings including smoke barriers and fire walls to effectively prepare the facility to deal with a fire."

Jones said the fact that the fire commissioner used a measure of discretionary power in making decisions about government facilities - while not affording that same opportunity to private personal care home owners - is worrisome.

"He didn't use that discretion when he did assessments of personal-care homes, did he?" Jones said. "Suddenly, because we are dealing with government properties, now its open to interpretation - I have problems with that.

"This is governing with hypocrisy at its finest."

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