



A COALITION OF THE NATIONAL READY MIXED CONCRETE ASSOCIATION

5.3.2018

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Pair of Fires in DC-area Reignites Concern with Combustible Building Materials

Virginia senior living facility and Maryland 4-story condo complex burn minutes apart

Silver Spring, MD – [Yesterday afternoon](#), firefighters in Prince George’s County, Maryland, and Fairfax County, Virginia, – suburbs of the Greater Washington, DC Metropolitan area – responded to a pair of fires that broke out around 1 p.m. The fire in Prince George’s County originated in a wood-framed, four-story condominium complex under construction and caused no injuries; meanwhile, the fire in Fairfax County occurred in a wood-framed senior living facility, resulting in two people being taken to the hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

The use of wooden components in both structures is reigniting concerns with combustible building materials in multi-family residential structures in the DC-area, especially as buildings – both occupied and under construction – have been the site of intense fires nationwide. There have been [dozens over the last few years](#).

This isn’t the first or the last time the DC-area has been forced to contend with fires in buildings of this sort.

In April 2017, [more than 200 firefighters](#) were called to the scene of a fire at a wooden apartment complex under construction in College Park, Maryland – the largest fire suppression effort in the history of Prince George’s County. A month later, construction workers were [evacuated](#) from a small fire at a partially-constructed, “[stick-built](#)” apartment complex in Arlington, Virginia.

“Until lawmakers recognize that ignoring this problem won’t cause it to go away, local residents and fire crews will continue to be placed in harm’s way,” said Kevin Lawlor, spokesperson for Build with Strength, a coalition of the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association consisting of community organizations, fire safety professionals, engineers, architects, and industry experts committed to strengthening the nation’s building codes and ensuring access to resilient housing. “Combustible buildings are a public safety risk for everyone involved, and when they burn, they become a tremendous financial burden on their communities due to the costly cleanup process.”

Efforts to remedy the situation have thus far been in vain. Legislation introduced in 2017 that sought to strengthen Maryland’s statewide building regulations – [House Bill 1311](#) and [Senate Bill 722](#), which sought to establish fire safety features for lightweight combustible wood

construction in low- to mid-rise residential buildings throughout the state – was met by opposition from groups like the Maryland Building Industry Association, whose members stand to benefit from the use of cheaper, wooden building materials, as opposed to concrete and steel.

In order to address the vulnerabilities that exist in combustible structures, Build with Strength has stepped up efforts to mitigate the dangers of fire for communities across the country. In reviewing current building and fire safety codes, the coalition is working to identify areas in need of improvement, particularly in updating building codes by including the use of non-combustible materials to minimize the risk of fires.

Learn more at www.buildwithstrength.com.

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