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Cost Study Reveals Financial Risks of Wood-Framed Construction

Safety Concerns, Revenue Losses Cited in Case-Based Analysis

Silver Spring, Maryland—A study released by Urvashi Kaul, Consultant and Adjunct Assistant Professor at Columbia University, seeks to address the issue of wood-framed residential fires, particularly multi-family wood-framed structures. The study, which examines two recent California apartment fires, focuses primarily on the economic impact wood-framed building fires have on communities and local governments.

The two fires cited in the study represent a range of financial loss and were selected to reflect the various costs to society of wood-framed residential fires. The first, a 2011, three-alarm fire at the Renaissance City Center in Carson, destroyed five buildings, damaged six more, and displaced senior citizens in adjacent buildings. The Carson fire was considered a total loss.

The second fire, a 2014 blaze at the 1.3 million square foot Da Vinci apartment complex in Los Angeles, required 250 firefighters to extinguish and shut down the northbound 101 for several hours. At least four surrounding buildings were damaged by the fire, including some owned or leased by the City Government.

“Los Angeles could lose \$22.6 billion in wood-framed residential fire losses over the next fifteen years,” Professor Kaul estimates. While property damage accounts for roughly \$20.5 billion of this figure, potential city expenditures could amount to \$132.5 million, with \$70.1 million going to police, fire, and sanitation departments, and another \$62.4 million of indirect costs, such as remediation, insurance, and planning.

“If we view construction projects as community investments then we should prioritize safety and longevity in the selection of materials,” says David Kersh, Executive Director of the Carpenters/Contractors Cooperation Committee. David Kersh is a member of 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 greater access to secure housing.

“Housing is the cornerstone of any community,” says Mr. Kersh. “Our personal and professional lives are built around where we choose to live. Strong and resilient housing will always foster strong and resilient communities.”

According to Kersh, Los Angeles and much of California has been recently experiencing unprecedented growth in residential, multi-unit construction. “The timeliness of this issue could not be more striking,” Kersh says. “We are building the future now, and we have to make sure we get it right. There’s no room for error.”

Build with Strength works with communities, lawmakers, and industry employees to advocate for safer, sustainable building materials. Strengthening local and national building codes is among the organization’s current top priorities.

Learn more at www.buildwithstrength.com

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