

MASSACHUSETTS BUILD WITH STRENGTH COALITION

SAFE BUILDINGS FOR THE FUTURE

A little over a year ago, BAC Local 3 joined with other labor unions and organizations and affiliated with the Build With Strength Coalition. The Coalition, an initiative of the National Ready Mix Concrete Association, is a growing alliance that is committed to working with state political leaders to improve fire safety standards of newly constructed buildings throughout the Commonwealth.

Its primary objective is to pass statewide legislation which would amend the state's building codes by mandating the use of non-combustible materials for the construction of commercial and mid-rise residential structures, four to seven stories in height. It would also mandate the installation of a fire barrier with a fire resistance rating of at least two hours from the foundation to the roof, as well as the installation of automatic sprinklers in unprotected areas. Light wood frame used in the construction of the typical single and multi-family dwellings would still be allowed.

The legislation entitled, An Act Relative To Safe Building Materials, aims to combat a damaging trend of fires in mid-rise residential and commercial buildings which are being constructed with cheap, combustible materials as well as, increase the level of awareness with the general public about this important safety issue. If enacted, the Act would drastically lower the chances of fires and reduce the speed at which fires could spread throughout a building. The end result would be safer, more durable buildings and an added level of protection for residents.

It's no secret that light frame wood buildings burn and these oversized tinder boxes burn very quickly. In fact, after a host of dangerous and costly fires swept the state over the past several years, the Waltham and Worcester City Councils unanimously passed resolutions calling on the State Legislature to amend the building codes for fire safety reasons.

Buildings that use concrete and masonry rather than wood is the best way to keep families and communities safe. A stronger Massachusetts begins with stronger building codes.

Although a perception exists that it is more expensive to build with non-combustible materials, this has proven not to be the case. An historical cost analysis conducted by the Dodge Data Analytics of 375 buildings built from 2014-2018 in Middlesex, Suffolk and Worcester Counties, found a cost savings

MASSACHUSETTS BUILD WITH STRENGTH COALITION MEMBERS

- Massachusetts Concrete and Aggregate Producers Association
- Mason Contractors Association of Massachusetts
- Bricklayers and Allied Craftmen Local 3
- Iron Workers Local 7
- Operating Engineers Local 4
- Teamsters Local 25
- Cement Masons Local 534
- Massachusetts Laborers District Council
- Sprinkler Fitters Local 550
- Steel Framing Industry Association
- Northeast Precast Concrete Association
- Portland Cement Association
- New England Concrete Manufacturers Association

of approximately 20% when building with non-combustible materials such as masonry and concrete.

The Massachusetts Legislature has prioritized the development of affordable, sustainable, resilient housing and we fully support this endeavor. But if we are to build more housing, we should be building much safer structures.

The proposed changes to the building code would prohibit the construction of buildings four to seven stories in height made with combustible materials. Because of the loosening of the building codes over the last ten years allowing for light frame wood construction, there has been a disturbing trend in Massachusetts

as well as nationally of major structural fires of buildings built with combustible materials. Waltham, Weymouth, Dorchester, Lawrence, Cambridge, Lowell and Northampton are just a few communities that have been adversely impacted in recent years due to enormous fires. These fires displace residents, strain public safety resources, and cost millions of dollars.

In addition to enhanced safety, non-combustible materials like masonry and concrete have proven to be more environmentally friendly and energy efficient over the long term. They significantly extend the life of a building and provide good savings in energy and insurance costs.

In the construction industry, the use of exterior and interior masonry, concrete, ceramic tile and waterproofing is more apt to be specified on heavier concrete and steel frame than on lightweight wood frame structures. In addition to the important safety issues being raised, the proposed legislation serves as a viable marketing tool relative to the positive attributes that masonry provides on mid-rise buildings.

Within the Northeast similar Coalitions which share the same objectives have also been established. BAC Local 1 Philadelphia and BAC Locals 4 and 5 New Jersey are participants in their respective areas. On the West Coast, similar Coalitions have also been formulated in Los Angeles and Seattle.

The passage of this legislation will no question be an uphill battle. The opposition includes, the American Wood Council, Northeastern Retail Lumber Dealers Association, National Association of Industrial and Office Properties and the Commercial Real Estate Development Association. However, numerous local and national organizations recognize and support the importance of building with non-combustible materials. The proposed changes will protect citizens and strengthen communities.