

AIA New York Chapter Testimony Concerning Intro. 126

23 February 2004

by Mark Ginsberg, AIA

Members of City Council and the Committee of Housing and Buildings, my name is Mark Ginsberg and I am President of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. I am speaking today on behalf of the AIA New York Chapter and its Code Committee.

Our organization, with 3,400 architect and professional members, strongly supports City Council Intro.126 and its intent to increase safety in high-rise buildings. The proposed legislation implements the recommendations presented in the World Trade Center Building Code Task Force. The legislation proposed would provide positive changes to improve safety in high-rise buildings with a height greater than 75 feet. These proposals come out of what we have learned from the study of the collapse of the World Trade Center, and particularly the problems that resulted from breaching the stair enclosures and elevator shafts.

Key changes include or require:

- Use of impact-resistant stair enclosures, thereby improving construction standards for new construction and encouraging utilization of new materials
- Inspection and maintenance of potentially deteriorated fireproofing of open-web steel joists during the course of building renovation to assure the integrity of the fireproofing, thereby maintaining the fire rating of the steel.
- Clarification on the restriction of use of open web steel joists so as not to exclude the use of other light-weight steel structures, including space frames.

The emphasis placed on evacuation rather than having building occupants remain within fire enclosures requires changes within the stairwells.

Directional exit signs will make exiting easier and more orderly. Changes in the required distance between "remote" fire stairs limit

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the use of scissor stairs to buildings with smaller floor plans and lower occupant loads. In new buildings, the use of smoke vestibules around the elevator shafts isolates the elevators from the stairs to avoid the spread of smoke throughout the floor and exit-ways. Some review of the design of stairs may be required to allow for larger numbers of building occupants and firefighters. The use of fire towers to prevent smoke from entering the stairwell is a return to one of the best attributes of older buildings.

Recommendations for existing buildings are worth noting. Sprinklers are being mandated in existing commercial buildings to contain the fire. The retroactive sprinkler provisions apply only to buildings with a height greater than 100 feet. Air intakes in new construction would have to be more than 20 feet above grade and 20 feet from any exhausts requiring roof access. This may be difficult to achieve for ground floor commercial spaces. The intent of the recommendations, to protect the central air intakes from biohazards and general exhaust fumes, may not be achieved by applying these requirements to ground floor spaces. We would recommend modifying this requirement to relate better to the particular conditions of ground floor space.

The need to update the New York City Building Code to the changing needs of office buildings after the World Trade Center attack and collapse is clear. Adopting the proposed legislation is a necessary first step, needed to keep the New York City Building Code current in the wake of heightened concern over building safety and egress. It is also vital to reiterate the necessity to take these useful improvements into the imminent and much-needed adoption of the International Building Code.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Monty Mitchell, AIA, Chair of the AIA New York Chapter's Code Committee and I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.