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Proposal to NFPA 285 Fails Sniff Test, But Passes Committee Vote

Falls Church, Va., June 8, 2017— The EIFS Industry Members Association is disappointed by the recent action taken during the NFPA Conference in Boston, that subsequently alters the NFPA Standard 285 test.

On June 7, members of NFPA voted in favor of a revision at the NFPA Technical Meeting that would effectively change the multi-story fire test for exterior walls. The proposed amendment seemingly now requires a new configuration for the test that includes a new joint (horizontal) about 4 feet above the window opening with another joint extending perpendicular from that joint upward.

“While a proposal that helps to better address the health and safety of a building and its occupants would’ve been understandable, this proposal did nothing of the kind” said David Johnston, executive director of the EIFS Industry Members Association. “Following this approval, our membership is left scratching their heads at the lack of data or reason that drove this change.”

The EIFS Industry Members Association and others spent the last several weeks discussing the proposed language with members of the NFPA Fire Safety Committee. Even after the amendment was approved, there are several questions and concerns that still exist:

1. According to testimony, the existing iteration of the NFPA test is in fact a more stringent indicator of a building’s fire safety, at least pertaining to a building clad with EIFS.
2. There does not appear to be any data or specific cases that are the driving force behind this code change.
3. According to testimony, the new iteration of the NFPA test will not be a realistic depiction of what is built in the field. The joints specified in the revised test are not typical of standard construction practices for EIFS, and a reasonable assertion is that the samples being tested will not always be reflective of how EIFS is constructed in the field.
4. The backlog that some testing laboratories might face could cause some previously approved wall systems from being tested in a reasonable period of time.
5. Wall systems, such as EIFS, will need to pay an estimated \$25,000 per test. There is no data that proves these re-tests will make any buildings safer than they currently are under the previously NFPA test.

With several unanswered questions remaining, and the fact that this decision will not make the current building stock safer, the EIFS Industry Members Association and others will be appealing the NFPA Technical Committee's recent decision.

Founded in 1981, the EIFS Industry Members Association (EIMA) is a national non-profit technical trade association comprised of leading manufacturers, suppliers, distributors and applicators involved in the exterior insulation and finish systems (EIFS) industry. For additional information please visit www.EIMA.com.