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Since 9/11, Most Americans Uncertain About Fire Safety in Tall Buildings

Survey finds that only seven percent of the population feels safer from fire in high-rise buildings since the World Trade Center Towers collapse

BETHESDA, MD – August 19, 2011 – A nationwide survey conducted by Society of Fire Protection Engineers (SFPE) revealed that only 7% of Americans feel safer from fire in high-rise buildings since the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001.

“Because most people will always remember the images of the World Trade Center Towers collapsing, it’s understandable only a small percentage of the population would feel safer in tall buildings,” said SPFE Engineering Program Manager, Chris Jelenewicz. “However, since 9/11, fire protection engineers have increased their scrutiny of extreme events and have significantly improved the science & technology that is needed to make high-rise buildings safer during emergencies.”

Fire protection engineers analyze buildings from the standpoint of how fires start and grow, and how they affect people and property. They work closely with other professionals, including architects, state and local building officials, and local fire departments to ensure safer high-rise buildings.

“With respect to fire, tall buildings have unique risks,” said Jelenewicz. “For example, fire department ladders cannot reach the upper floors of a high-rise building and it takes more time for people to evacuate during an emergency.”

In 2005, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), as part of the World Trade Center Towers collapse investigation, recommended including fire protection engineers in building design teams in order to prevent future devastation, especially with high rise buildings. The report also recommended significant changes to the way tall buildings are constructed to make them more resistant to fire and more easily evacuated during emergencies. Many of these recommendations resulted in changes to the model building and fire codes.

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Some of the changes to the way tall buildings are designed and constructed that have occurred since 9/11 include:

- Facilitating more efficient building evacuations
- Improvements in the marking of exits
- Protecting the integrity of stair and elevator enclosures
- Increasing the reliability of fire protection systems
- Improving the installation of structural fireproofing
- Facilitating improved emergency responder operations.

“Although better building design and construction methods cannot stop determined terrorists, they can dramatically increase the number of lives saved in the event of an attack.” said Jelenewicz. “The changes to the way fire protection engineers design tall buildings have become the new norm in the construction industry and will certainly make our tall buildings safer.”

The SPFE survey was conducted online within the US January, 2011 among 1,000 adults. Respondents for this survey were selected via a systematic random sample from among those who have agreed to participate in Synovate Panel surveys. The Synovate online panel is composed of over 840,000 adults who have been recruited to regularly participate in Synovate’s online surveys. Data were weighted by age, race/ethnicity, sex, and education, to reflect population proportions. The complete survey is available at www.sfpe.org/SFPETools/MediaPress.aspx.

**What is a Fire Protection Engineer?**

According to the Society of Fire Protection Engineers, a fire protection engineer applies science and engineering principles to protect people, homes, workplaces, the economy and the environment from the devastating effects of fires. Fire protection engineers analyze how buildings are used, how fires start and grow, and how fires affect people and property. They use the latest technologies to design systems to control fires, alert people to danger, and provide means for escape. Fire protection engineers also work closely with other professionals, including engineers of other disciplines, architects, state and local building officials, and local fire departments to build fire safe communities. Fire protection engineers are in high demand. The number of available jobs far exceeds the supply.

**About Society of Fire Protection Engineers**

Organized in 1950, the Society of Fire Protection Engineers (SFPE) is the professional organization that represents engineers engaged in fire protection worldwide. Through its membership of over 5,000 professionals and 65 international chapters, SFPE advances the science and practice of fire protection engineering while maintaining a high ethical standard. SFPE and its members serve to make the world a safer place by reducing the burden of unwanted fire through the application of science and technology. To become a member, go to www.sfpe.org.

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