

SCHULTE & ASSOCIATES

Building Code Consultants
880D Forest Avenue
Evanston, IL 60202
fpeschulte@aol.com
504/644-8900

TRIMMING THE NATION'S FIRE PROTECTION BUDGET

By Richard Schulte

“Consider this as a grand challenge for the Research Foundation: to promote an approach to require tools for all NFPA code changes to be accompanied by a documented cost benefit analysis.” (Follow-up Comment 7, “Fire Protection and Safety: The Next 25 Years”, The Fire Protection Research Foundation, 2008)

“The \$294 billion cost of fire per year is 42% of the cost for the recently proposed \$700 billion economic bailout package. The \$294 billion cost of fire per year is \$24.5 billion a month which is a little more than twice the estimated \$10-12 billion monthly cost of the war in Iraq.” (Follow-up Comment 8, “Fire Protection and Safety: The Next 25 Years”, The Fire Protection Research Foundation, 2008)

For the last several months, the issues of raising the Federal Government’s debt ceiling, as well as spending and taxation, have been discussed in public on a daily basis. For the last two weeks or so, these discussions have dominated the news. Given this, it seems appropriate that, perhaps, we take some time to discuss the portion of resources allocated to fire and fire protection in the United States.

As indicated above, the United States allocates close to \$300 billion annually addressing the fire problem. In other words, the next decade we will spend more than \$3 trillion on fire and fire protection in the U.S. Given that astronomical sum, it seems reasonable to expect that fire protection professionals should be asking themselves whether or not all of this spending is necessary.

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Can we maintain the same level of fire safety and reduce the cost of fire/fire protection in the United States at the same time? It’s my opinion that the answer to this question is definitely affirmative, but unfortunately there seems to be little interest in doing so.

On the codes and standards side of fire protection, it's time to introduce the concept of cost/benefit analysis. Many of the mandated fire safety features included in our construction codes simply cannot be justified were a cost/benefit analysis applied to each and every fire safety provision in our codes and standards.

Over-spending on building fire protection takes money out of the economy which could be put to better (more productive) use somewhere else. Fire protection professionals owe it to the general public to make an effort to rein in much of the unnecessary spending on fire protection in the country.

Now that the focus is on trimming the Federal Government's budget would be a good time to give some serious thought to trimming the US fire/fire protection budget too.

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