



Senator John Kerry Letter

Jun 1st, 2006

Kerry Pushes Consumer Product Safety Commission To Answer For Unsafe Smoke Detectors

BOSTON – Senator John Kerry today sent a letter to the head of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), urging her to answer for smoke detectors that have continuously proven to be unsafe. Kerry’s letter is a follow up on a letter sent by Deputy Chief Joseph Fleming of the Boston Fire Department, who raised the issue with the CPSC earlier this year.

In his letter, dated March 12, 2008, Chief Fleming drew attention to safety issues surrounding ionization smoke detectors and asked the CPSC to investigate. The CPSC, which had expressed concerns about the detectors as early as 1995, has failed to investigate or to even respond to Chief Fleming’s concerns.

“This should be a no-brainer. If smoke detectors are proven to be ineffective, why are they still being used? Chief Fleming rightly raised this question earlier this year. I strongly urge the CPSC to immediately provide answers to his concerns as well as to consider the potential loss of life when Americans are using inadequate and unsafe smoke detectors,” said Senator Kerry.

The text of the letter is below:

June 12, 2008

Chairman Nancy Nord

US Consumer Product Safety Commission

4330 East-West Highway

Room 419, Bethesda, MD 20814

Dear Chairman Nord:

I am writing as a follow-up to a letter sent to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) by Deputy Fire Chief Joseph Fleming of the Boston Fire Department on March 12, 2008 regarding the safety of smoke alarms. It is my understanding that there are multiple unresolved issues concerning ionization detectors’ inability to detect smoke or sound an alarm. In fact, it is my understanding that the CPSC expressed serious concerns regarding ionization detectors as early as 1995. These concerns mirror those put forward by Chief Fleming, an outspoken advocate for removing ionization detectors from the marketplace. Yet, the CPSC still has not acted to remove the alarms from the market, nor has the CPSC warned consumers as to the potential drawbacks of ionized detectors.

The issues that appear to be the most prescient and that were addressed by Mr. Fleming in his letter to you, still remain unsettled. I ask that you address, the questions in Chief Fleming’s letter in detail, and respond to the following concerns:

1. The National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) has found that, on average, a photoelectric detector is 30 minutes faster in detecting a smoldering fire than an ionized detector. The highest percentage of deaths caused by smoldering fires occurs while people are sleeping, when the operation of a smoke detector is critical. In fact, this percentage may be as high as 100 percent. Four years ago NIST reached the conclusion that ionization detectors sometimes fail to alarm in smoldering fires, even when visibility is significantly degraded by smoke.
2. While ionized detectors alarm sooner in “ultra-fast” flaming fires by an average of 50 seconds, those seconds appear to be negligible considering that most people are awake when flaming fires occur. In addition, in what appears to be the most common type of flaming fires (i.e. cooking fires) the photoelectric detector was providing more than enough time for an occupant to escape.
3. Several studies show that the ionization smoke detector is many times more likely to be disabled than photoelectric detectors.
4. The ionization smoke detector is being used by the vast majority of Americans. The ionization smoke alarms susceptibility to nuisance alarms (leading to disablement) and inadequate response to smoldering fires could be responsible for hundreds of needless deaths each year.

Recently, due to the efforts of Chief Fleming of the Boston Fire Department to educate the authorities to these facts, the states of Massachusetts and Vermont have taken steps to restrict the use of ionization smoke detectors in residential occupancies. In response to the available evidence that suggests the inherent danger of ionization detectors, I ask that you promptly investigate the issues raised by Chief Fleming, and that you respond to his letter of March 12, 2008.

Fire safety and the use of working fire alarms are vital to the protection of our children, seniors, adults and families around the United States. I strongly urge you to provide a timely response to the above concerns and to consider the potential loss of life should it become clear that a large percentage of Americans are using inadequate smoke detectors.

I appreciate your attention to this matter. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

John F. Kerry

Extracted 27 July, 2010 from: www.brkelectronics.com/news/kerry-photoelectric-press1/

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