2008 IAFF CONVENTION
Resolution No. 15

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENT: Policy
Re: Photoelectric Smoke Alarms

WHEREAS, over 3,000 citizens perish in structural fires across the United States and Canada every year; and

WHEREAS, in at least 30% of these fires, it has been documented that the smoke alarms operated and in 20% of these fires, the smoke alarms were disabled; and

WHEREAS, there are two principle types of smoke alarms that are intended to alert occupants of building fires: ionization and photoelectric smoke alarms. Ionization smoke alarms predominantly detect the presence of extremely small particles of smoke – often invisible – typical of flaming fires, while photoelectric smoke alarms predominantly detect larger smoke particles – always visible – typical conditions found at smoldering fires; and

WHEREAS, research indicates that both ionization and photoelectric smoke alarms are intended to provide occupants time to escape. However, ionization smoke alarms may not operate in time to alert occupants early enough to escape from smoldering fires; and

WHEREAS, current research indicates that ionization smoke alarms detect flaming fires marginally earlier than photoelectric smoke. However, ionization smoke alarms are far more prone to nuisance alarms increasing the probability that they will be disabled by building occupants; and

WHEREAS, photoelectric smoke alarms detect smoldering fires and fires starting in areas

remote from smoke alarms significantly earlier than ionization smoke alarms; and

WHEREAS, dual alarms, also called combination alarms, that contain both technologies are available but the benefit over photoelectric in the response to fires is marginal. They are more costly, and they will experience the same nuisance problem as ionization smoke alarms; and

WHEREAS, as many fires in residential occupancies begin as smoldering fires, particularly when occupants are sleeping, photoelectric smoke alarms provide more effective all-around detection and alarm than ionization alarms; and

WHEREAS, failure to detect a fire and provide an early alarm places building occupants at risk from an ever-escalating fire; and

WHEREAS, such escalating fires place the lives of firefighters responding to an increasing risk from such an escalating fire; and

WHEREAS, the increase in the use of photoelectric technology has the potential to save hundreds of lives each year and should be promoted as the technology of choice by members of the IAFF in their homes; and

WHEREAS, IAFF members should advocate for their mandatory requirement for placement and use of photoelectric alarms in fire and building codes, in a manner similar to recent legislation in Vermont and Massachusetts; and

WHEREAS, the Professional Fire Fighters of Vermont, with the assistance and technical expert testimony from IAFF Local 718 member and Boston Fire Department Deputy Chief Jay Fleming successfully lobbied for such legislation that on May 29, 2008, Governor Jim Douglas signed into law as the first in the nation legislation mandating the

installation of photoelectric smoke detectors in all new construction and at the time of sale of property in Vermont; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the IAFF propose and support the mandate of only photoelectric smoke detectors in United States and Canadian federal law, in all state, provincial and local legislation, and in all standard development organizations' building, fire and life safety codes and standards; and be it further

RESOLVED, That this official IAFF position be presented to the United States Fire Administration, the United States National Institute of Standards and Technology, the Congressional Fire Services Institute, the National Fire Protection Association, the International Code Council, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the National Association of State Fire Marshals, the Council of Canadian Fire Marshals and Fire Commissioners Health Canada, the Standards Council of Canada, the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, and the Consumers Association of Canada.

Submitted by: Professional Fire Fighters of Vermont
Local 718, Boston, MA

Cost Estimate: None

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: Adopt
CONVENTION ACTION: Adopt