

Sen. Wesely suggests high-rise fire safety bill

By Mary Kempkes

UNL residence halls could be in for expensive renovations if proposed legislation is passed next session.

A bill to be proposed by Lincoln Sen. Don Wesely would require all high-rise buildings to have adequate safety equipment. Equipment which Wesely speculates most residence halls don't have. High-rise would probably mean 75 feet—the average height beyond which rescue equipment cannot reach, according to the State Fire Marshall's Office.

This would include most UNL residence halls and several class buildings.

While Lincoln and Omaha have adequate regulations requiring fire equipment in new construction, the safety measures are not mandatory in existing buildings. Wesely said older buildings need improved fire equipment most.

The high-rise fire bill would force all existing buildings including all those on UNL and UNO campuses to up-

date their fire equipment to meet standards set in the bill.

Fire equipment which the bill could make mandatory includes fire alarms, public address systems, extinguishers, sprinkler systems and areas of refuge—rooms which can resist fire for at least two hours. These are included in the Lincoln codes for new construction.

Wesely said the bill was first introduced last session, though recent tragedies—the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas and the Stouffer's Inn fire in White Plains, N.Y.—have given it some attention.

"That's what happened there," Wesely said. "No alarm, no one knew about the fire."

"Obviously the time is right to move with it (the bill)."

The renovations will be expensive, Wesely said, because it is more expensive to upgrade an old building than to include safety equipment in new building plans. Other fire safety corrections made to UNL buildings in 1975 cost about \$1.71 million.

For this reason, Wesely said, he expects a battle to get the bill passed. Owners of older homes, offices and resi-

dence halls will fight to have a grandfather clause attached to the bill, excluding existing buildings.

"He's gonna jump," Wesely said. "He's not gonna like it. They should be concerned about cost. That's only fair. But I think the balance factor is the value you place on human life."

"We've seen the inadequate fire codes that have caused the deaths of many people. I don't want to wait until someone dies in Nebraska before we do something."

Wesely said he would like to reorganize state agencies dealing with building safety codes through related but separate legislation. Proper organization, he said, could eliminate inspection duplications. For example, one state agency makes routine inspections of elevators, another of fire equipment and another of boilers. If consolidated under one agency, he said the state could save time and money.

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Causing accidental death often too hard to bear

By Jim Garrett

It was just an accident yet now somebody is dead. She forgot to look behind the car as she backed out of the driveway and now the neighbor's boy is gone.

He had always checked his gun when crossing a fence while hunting with his brother, but he forgot just this once and now his brother is gone.

Accidental death, the suddenness of it all. The incident just won't go away. The regret and remorse of some past tragedy lingers. The constant recreation of the accident. These plus the added weight of the unrelieved guilt are just part of what those who are the cause of an accidental death of a friend, a loved one or stranger suffer the rest of their lives.

But this is just the beginning of people's lives after an accident involving death, said Barbara Chesser, associate professor of human development and the family at UNL.

People who read about the accident soon forget the victim while family and friends mourn the loss. Meanwhile, little has been said or done to help the person who was the cause of the accidental death, Chesser said.

Victim and cause

The emphasis and attention of an accidental death focuses on the victim and the initial cause, Chesser said. The death begins to fade away from the public with the passage of time, but lingers not only in the hearts and minds of the victim's family and friends, but also in the one responsible for the accident.

She said there are probably more responsible for accidental deaths than realized in the 100,000 plus accidental deaths recorded each year in the United States.

The guilt last years after the accident has disappeared from the public eye, Chesser said. Just how many people have unresolved feelings from having caused an accidental death is unknown.

Chesser said that one case that occurred about 40 years ago involved an individual who was showing off by driving too close to an unloading school bus. His rear wheel caught and killed a child getting off the bus.

He was excused from all criminal charges and the community forgave him, but as time passed he had serious life problems, contemplated suicide, dealt with a severe drinking problem and harbored an extreme amount of guilt for what he had done. She said the outside world views him as a very successful businessman with two daughters and a wife who all graduated from college, but on the inside is a total disaster.

Compounded problem

Chesser said the lack of any punishment from society has compounded his problem to some extent, but the fact that he ended the life of another has stayed with him all these years.

Chesser sent a questionnaire to those who enquire about her research into accidental death. The individual is asked to voluntarily recreate the accident and evaluate their life and problems that have been affected by the accident.

She said the questionnaire has revealed two main things. Many people have questioned their belief in God, such as how could a loving God let this happen to me? And that the accident was the worst crisis that has ever happened to them.

Chesser said the people have said it helps them when they have a friend willing to listen and not give them the third degree of the how and the why of the accident. Joking doesn't help the individual, she said, it just complicates the guilt they have to bear.

The humor element comes from those who try to cover up or hide their own inadequacies concerning death, Chesser said.

Another case involved a lifeguard who listened to a bystander repeat that the drowning victim was only faking it. She kept listening to the bystander while the victim kept sinking. By the time that she understood that it wasn't a joke it was too late.

Self-punishment worse

Chesser said recreating the scene often is too horrible to bear, and the responsible one runs from reality and tries to hide from what happened. The self-punishment is often worse than what they have or might have received from society.

Some of the people who caused an accident have chosen to devote themselves to counseling careers to make up for the loss of another life, Chesser said.

But counseling a person who caused a death is extremely difficult she said. She mentioned that letters from doctors and counselors requesting information on how to deal with this type of case has shown that research in this area is definitely needed.

Unlike counseling a faltering marriage, where hope of making it good again is a possibility, the accidental death deals with a finality. The sheer permanency of it is overwhelming to many of the individuals and counselors, Chesser said.

Many people say they have learned to live with it, but can't forget it. It is so trite to say that time will help Chesser said. She cited the case of a train engineer who was unable to stop the train before it demolished an old man and his car. She said the engineer remembers and suffers every time he passes that intersection.

Chesser said the finality of death is the hardest thing to handle.

The public is not aware that often the person who was part of the accident is not responsible for it, but is a person of circumstance and consequence, Chesser said.

Chesser said it must be remembered that anyone could find themselves in a situation where circumstances lead to an accidental death or injury. It can't be said that the individual responsible for an accidental death is any less safe than the rest of society that hasn't been involved in the same situations.




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