



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
of June 4, 2007**

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Protecting Our Citizens

JEFFERSON CITY — Just recently, Governor Blunt signed into law a measure that will go a long way to protecting some of our most vulnerable citizens, [House 952](#), the law that will require sprinklers and fire alarm systems in most long-term care facilities.

House Bill 952 was prompted by the tragic events of November 27th, 2006 when the Anderson Guest House in Southwest Missouri burned to the ground, killing 10 mentally disabled residents and one worker. Witnesses describe the horrific scene of this home for dozens of residents as chaotic with many of those residents dragging themselves from the flames, bloody and confused. Some workers tried in vain to save the residents with at least one woman, believed to be a worker, dragged kicking and screaming from the scene, not wanting to leave until everyone had been found. It's a scene that still today provokes powerful emotions... one being that it just didn't have to happen this way. Investigators believe an electrical short caused the fire in the early morning hours of that November day, but there was nothing to suppress the fire that would be a killer. You see, the Anderson Guest House was not required to have a sprinkler system because it was "grandfathered" under provisions that said it didn't have to have such a system because it was built before 1980. We had to change that law, and HB 952 does just that.

The new law requires sprinklers in new facilities, sets standards for putting sprinklers into existing facilities, improves fire alarm systems, and increases fire safety education and planning. HB 952 will make sure all new or upgraded long-term care facilities will install and maintain commercial-grade sprinkler systems. Existing facilities with more than 20 residents that don't

currently meet National Fire Protection Association standards will have to install residential-grade sprinklers. We know this is not a cost-free proposition for these homes, so a low-interest loan program has been established to help them meet the 2012 deadline.

This new law won't bring back the 11 people who died in the Anderson Guest House fire, but maybe it will prevent the next tragedy from happening. It was the least we lawmakers could do to protect our citizens.

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Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid, Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.