
Local Government Committee

HB 2864

Brief Description: Preventing fires in rental dwelling units.

Sponsors: Representative Eslick.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the director of fire (Director) protection to investigate ways to prevent fire deaths in rental dwellings.
- Requires the Director to convene a task force of various stakeholders, allow for public comment at task force meetings, and provide a report on the task force's findings and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.

Hearing Date: 1/30/18

Staff: Yvonne Walker (786-7841).

Background:

The Office of the State Fire Marshal (Office) is a bureau within the Washington State Patrol (WSP). The Office of the State Fire Marshal provides various services to fire districts, government agencies, and the public including, but not limited to: coordination of the state fire service resources for mobilization during large-scale fires and disasters; fire incident reporting and data collection; fire code review and adoption; and construction plan reviews for fire sprinkler and alarm systems. In addition, the Office provides instructional programs and high-risk fire training to fire departments and fire protection districts, hazardous materials training, and fire prevention education.

The chief of the WSP is responsible for appointing the director of fire protection (Director). The Director is required to promulgate rules and regulations regarding the design, manufacture, and installation of smoke detection devices in dwelling units. The Director is also authorized to enter premises and buildings for the purpose of inspecting and determining whether a fire hazard exists, and requiring conformance with minimum standards for fire prevention.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The Residential Landlord-Tenant Act governs the relationship between landlords and tenants of residential dwelling units, establishes the duties and liabilities of the parties, and provides procedures for each side to enforce its rights. A tenant's duties include, for example, the duty to pay rent, keep the premises clean, not intentionally destroy property, maintain smoke detector devices, and not engage in certain activity that is dangerous to others.

Summary of Bill:

The Director must:

- investigate ways to prevent fire deaths in rental dwellings,
- educate landlords and tenants regarding their responsibilities,
- develop possible criminal penalties,
- evaluate insurance certification requirements or changes to the building code, and
- review other possible programs or funding that would improve installation and maintenance of smoke detectors in rental apartments and single-family homes.

The Director must form a task force. The stakeholders of the task force must include, but are not limited to, landlords of residential units, tenants, local governments, firefighters, representatives from home builders and construction trades, the insurance industry, and a nonprofit that provides free smoke detectors and installation.

The state fire marshal must convene the initial task force meeting. The task force must choose its chair from among its membership and must allow public comments at its meetings. The task force must update the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2019, and report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2020.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.