

Oregon Building Codes Division Bans Wired Glass

PRESS RELEASE

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Oregon Building Codes Division Bans Wired Glass. **Oregon Becomes First State in the Nation to Protect Children & Adults.**

SALEM – On Wednesday, August 6, 2003, the Oregon State Building Codes Division announced it is moving forward on amendments to the Oregon Structural Specialty Code that will ban the use of wired glass in hazardous locations subject to human impact in all educational facilities, gymnasiums, athletic facilities, and commercial structures in the state of Oregon (www.oregonbcd.org). Wired glass is a fire-rated glass that is commonly used in schools, athletic facilities, hospitals, correctional facilities and many other locations. By adopting these code changes, Oregon becomes the first state in the nation to protect children and adults from suffering serious and often permanent injury by requiring all glass in areas subject to human impact to meet recognized impact standards.

For over 25 years, since 1977, manufacturers of wired glass have been enjoying a “temporary” exemption from safety standards at the expense of the health and safety of Oregonians,” said Senator Vicki Walker (D-Eugene), “Contrary to popular belief, wired glass is not classified as a safety glazing material by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. I am thrilled that Oregon’s Building Codes Division has recognized the inherent dangers of wired glass and will lead the nation in protecting our citizens.” The four foreign manufacturers—three in Japan, one in the United Kingdom—manufacture the entire world supply of wired glass.

This legislative session, Walker sponsored SB 824 that would have prohibited installation of wired glass in areas now subject to the new code. The legislation also required building owners to remove or retrofit existing wired glass in those same locations no later than 2012. Walker agreed to allow the Building Codes Division to go forward with their code change process, but continued to work on other aspects of the bill. Senate Bill 824 never made it out of committee because school districts were concerned about the potential costs to their already strapped budgets. Unfazed, Walker contacted Susan Castillo, Superintendent of Public Instruction, to bring the issue to her attention. Castillo’s office is expected to issue an advisory to schools in the near future. Once the new code provisions take effect, all replacement glass will need to meet the new standards. Although not expected to be installed in new construction, a special fire-rated film may be purchased and installed on wired glass at low cost in existing buildings to enhance its impact and safety performance.

School District 4J in Eugene has already begun the process of replacement in many of their schools after Sen. Walker and Greg Abel of Advocates for Safe Glass brought the issue to their attention. Greg Abel, a Eugene resident, is founder of the nonprofit organization Advocates for Safe Glass (www.safeglass.org) which brought forward the code change proposals. Mr. Abel formed the organization after his son, Jarred Abel, was injured when his hand impacted wired glass while playing basketball in a University of Oregon gymnasium in January 2001.

Sen. Walker, Greg Abel and others will be testifying before the International Code Council (ICC) in Nashville, Tennessee, in early September. They will be advocating for the ICC to adopt the same standards nationwide that Oregon has just adopted.

Final ratification by the Building Codes Structures Board will occur on September 10. The code changes will then be adopted in two phases: educational facilities, gymnasiums and athletic facilities must meet the new standards effective October 1, 2003; all other commercially constructed buildings have until October 1, 2004, before the new code change takes effect. The standard for educational facilities, gymnasiums and athletic facilities is consistent with newly adopted national codes. The phase-in date for commercial buildings is to allow for additional notification to building owners and designers.