



October 2, 2008

Open Letter from the Fire Chief to the Citizens of Northglenn

Dear Citizens of Northglenn:

The City of Northglenn does not have its own fire department. Fire and emergency rescue services are provided in the City of Northglenn by the North Metro Fire Rescue District. The Fire District is a separate governmental entity with a Board of Directors elected by citizens in the District, including the citizens of Northglenn. The authority of the Fire District to enforce the Fire Code in the City is granted by State statute, not by a city ordinance.

The purpose of this letter is to advise the citizens of Northglenn and the City employees who use the Northglenn Recreation Center of the position of the Fire District on whether the Recreation Center can remain open while the City corrects serious fire code violations. On June 2, 2008, North Metro Fire Rescue District issued an Order to Comply that requires the City of Northglenn to make repairs and modifications as a condition of continuing to use the Northglenn Recreation Center. The Fire District issued an Amended Order to Comply on August 8, 2008. The recreation facility is in violation of the City Fire Code. Many of the Fire Code violations are serious and present "life safety" hazards for the citizens and employees who use the facility.

How did the Fire Code violations that make the Recreation Center unsafe remain undiscovered for so long? When the Recreation Center was built in 1975, City Building Officials issued the Certificate of Occupancy. A Certificate of Occupancy should only be issued by a city when a building is in compliance with the Building and Fire Codes. Based upon a recent, independent report by a nationally-recognized architectural and engineering firm hired by the City, it has become clear that the building was not in compliance with the Building or Fire Codes that were in effect at the time.

Barker Rinker Seacat (BRS) is the consulting firm hired by the City earlier this year to evaluate the Recreation Center and make recommendations for repairs, modifications and improvements. BRS also inspected and evaluated the building to determine whether there were "life safety" concerns. BRS provided the City with its report; with a copy of the BRS report also being provided to the Fire District on May 1, 2008. The BRS report brought serious "life safety" hazards to the attention of the Fire District.

Some examples of the "life safety" deficiencies identified include:

- The Northglenn Recreation Center is a large building with wooden ceiling rafters. In the event of a fire, this type of construction allows fire to spread quickly throughout the entire building.
- There are no partitions in the wooden rafter ceiling to prevent fire from spreading quickly.
- There is no sprinkler system in the building. (Sprinkler systems are essential in buildings that have the type of construction and are of the size of the Recreation Center. This was true under the Fire Code in existence at the time the Recreation Center was built in 1975 and is true today under the current Fire Code. Sprinkler systems in buildings like the Recreation Center are needed to protect persons in the building in the event of a fire; and to assist firefighters with controlling fires thereby resulting in less damage to the building.)
- There are numerous problems with the electrical system that can start a fire.

- There are deficiencies in the emergency exiting that can result in persons not being able to get out of the building in the event of a fire.
- There are deficiencies in the fire alarm system. (One of the fire alarm deficiencies is particularly troubling as it relates to the ability to effectively warn seniors who use the upper portions of the facility.)

The "life safety" issues identified by BRS are very serious. The seriousness of the hazards has made it very difficult for the Fire District to allow the Recreation Center to remain open while Fire Code violations are being corrected. Since the Orders to Comply were issued, the Fire District and City staff have worked together to keep the Recreation Center open without exposing the citizens and employees, who use and work in the building, to unreasonable risk of harm. City staff provides the Fire District with weekly status reports; and, City and Fire District representatives regularly meet to discuss progress. On occasion, reasonable extensions have been granted when the City is unable to meet the deadlines set forth in the Orders to Comply.

The City has completed several of the tasks required by the Orders to Comply; but, City staff has recently advised the Fire District that the City needs additional time to complete the work to correct some of the most serious hazards. The Fire District must decide whether to grant the City additional time. The decision to grant the additional time, rather than enforcing the Order to Comply by closing all or part of the Recreation Center until the Fire Code violations are corrected, will be made based upon two things: first, the City's continued cooperation in making the facility safe and in compliance with the Fire Code; and second, the amount of progress the City has made in correcting the Fire Code violations.

The Fire District thanks the City of Northglenn for its efforts to date; but the work needed to bring the Recreation Center into compliance with the Fire Code and make it safe for continued use is far from complete. As Northglenn's fire service provider, the Fire District cannot allow serious fire code violations to go uncorrected for an extended period of time. If the City does not continue to correct the hazards in a timely manner, it will be necessary for the Fire District to enforce the Orders to Comply, including possible closures of the facility. The Fire District sincerely hopes that further enforcement action will not be necessary.

Sincerely,

John O'Hayre,
Fire Chief