

One More Way That You Might Be a Criminal – 08/19/2004

Will Living In a Home Without a Smoke Alarm Make You a Criminal?

By Ernie Whiteside

MONROE, Michigan, August 19, 2004 - Michigan Senators have recently passed a series of well-intentioned bills that may make you a criminal. The bills passed through the Senate with no apparent controversy, and like almost all such legislation these new laws will make government larger, more expensive and more intrusive.

In the year 2001, a total of 2,673 people died in uncontrolled building or structure fires. Approximately half of those fires occurred in homes without fire alarms. While every life is precious, this statistic must be put in prospective with other risks of death. For instance, 30,261 deaths were attributed to suicide. You are 22 times more likely to intentionally kill yourself than you are to unintentionally die in a house fire where there is no smoke detector. Another way is to say that your risk of death in a house fire where there is no smoke detector is about nine in a million. Your chances of being struck by lightning are about two in a million (1 in 600,000).

Progressive politicians are willing to make you and me criminals to reduce the risk further! State Senate Bill 742 will make it unlawful to live in a residential dwelling without at least one single-station smoke alarm for buildings constructed before November 6, 1974. Construction codes have required residential units constructed after that date to have smoke alarms, but you may now be a criminal if you fail to maintain them in working order and according to code. State Senate Bills 337, 338 and 339 are also "progressive". Historically, smoke alarm requirements for commercial buildings and multi-unit residential rental properties has been a matter for local municipal government, these bills make requirements a state law.

Why do we need this law? We don't! It is the fruit of a progressive element in politics that has incrementally increased the size, cost and scope of government for 150 years. Virtually every fire station in America will provide a smoke alarm to any of the 6% of us that do not already have one absolutely free of charge!

So why did it pass? For one thing, only 6% of the population is currently non-compliant. Even if the vast majority of voting electors were paying attention to this issue, they would not see it as a threat to them. Second, every life lost is precious and it is easy to let our compassion for others overrule common sense.

The bill is pushed on the premise that children are the victims, the nationwide statistics will illustrate that about 250 children under the age of fifteen died in a house fire where there was no smoke detector. Since half of the victims of house fires have smoke detectors, we might save about 5 to 10 children in the state of Michigan each year if 100% of all residential units had smoke detectors. A lot of squeeze for a little juice!

So why oppose it? It increases the size, cost and scope of government, it offers a very low benefit return in exchange for the cost, and it exceeds the constitutional limits of government. Oops! I slipped and said that evil word, "constitutional". All Americans have an unalienable right "to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures". Will your home now be subject to inspection? Will the inspectors even be required to obtain a warrant? What is the punishment for choosing to accept the risks associated with living in a house that does not have a smoke alarm? How many small children are really being protected by this law?

What alternatives exist for compassionate people who want to reduce the risk for small children? If you know somebody who is living in a home that does not have a working smoke detector, you can choke up \$10 and buy them one or you can turn their name over to local authorities for prosecution. Buying them a smoke detector (or getting one for them at no charge from the local fire station) could save the state of Michigan millions of dollars in enforcement costs and could save the lives of 5 - 10 children statewide every year. I'm not sure how subjecting a family that has not obtained a smoke detector to inspections,

finer and possible jail time is compassionate, but I'm sure that any student of Hitler or Stalin, knows the answer.

If you don't live in Michigan, has your state already passed a law like this one? Will it soon?

http://www.michigan.gov/cis/0,1607,7-154-10573_11549-79324--,00.html

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