

SMOKE ALARM BATTERY STANDARD ACT

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House Bill 5407 (H-1) as reported from committee

Sponsor: Rep. Mike Mueller

1st Committee: Regulatory Reform

2nd Committee: Ways and Means

Complete to 6-18-20

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

BRIEF SUMMARY: House Bill 5407 would create a new act to require, beginning April 1, 2022, that smoke detector units sold in Michigan be powered by a nonremovable, 10-year battery. The bill would not apply to systems that are wireless or hardwired into a building.

FISCAL IMPACT: House Bill 5407 would not have a fiscal impact on the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) or any other unit of state or local government. The bill would allow LARA to promulgate rules, but there would be no impact on the department.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Most deaths from home fires are due to smoke inhalation and not the fire itself. In 2018, Michigan ranked third in the nation for deaths from fires with 213 lives lost; 30 deaths were recorded in the first two months of 2020. According to testimony provided by fire inspectors, when most furnishings were made with natural materials, people had about 15 to 17 minutes to escape a burning building before being overcome by toxic fumes. Now, with many furnishings made of synthetic materials, which burn more quickly and release more toxic gases, people have about 3 minutes to escape. The difference between life and death can be the minutes of early warning provided by smoke alarms. All too often after a fire, however, smoke alarms, if present, are found to contain either dead batteries or no batteries at all.

Recently, smoke alarm device technology has advanced to make available nontamperable models with sealed battery compartments containing lithium batteries that last at least 10 years. It is believed that if all smoke alarms sold in the state had the newer technology, more lives could be saved.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 5407 would create a new act called the Smoke Alarm Battery Standard Act. The new act would prohibit, beginning April 1, 2022, the sale, offer for sale, distribution, or importation into the state of a smoke alarm device powered by a replaceable and removable battery. Instead, also beginning April 1, 2022, a device would have to be powered for not less than 10 years by either a nonremovable and nonreplaceable battery (e.g., a lithium ion battery in a sealed unit) or by another power source that utilizes new technology.

The new act would not apply to systems that are hardwired into a building or that are wireless or Wi-Fi connected. Specifically, the bill would exempt the following:

- A fire alarm, smoke detector, or smoke alarm that receives power, or that has an ancillary component that receives power, from an electrical system of a building.
- A fire alarm, smoke detector, or smoke alarm that is electronically connected, or that has an ancillary component that is electronically connected, as part of a centrally monitored or supervised alarm system.
- A fire alarm, smoke detector, or smoke alarm that uses, or that has an ancillary component that uses, one or more of the following:
 - A low-power radio frequency wireless communication signal.
 - Wi-Fi or other wireless local area networking capability to send and receive notifications to and from the internet.
- Any other smoke alarm device with equivalent characteristics to a device described above, as determined by rules that the bill would allow LARA to promulgate in consultation with the state fire marshal under the Administrative Procedures Act.

The new act would apply to a person or entity who sold, offered to sell, distributed, or imported a smoke alarm device on or after April 1, 2022.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Despite years of warnings, public service announcements, and even free smoke alarm giveaways, scores of people die every year in home fires. Some older homes have no smoke alarms. Others have nonworking devices because the batteries either were not replaced when they died or were removed because the alarm was chirping or went off too often when dinner was cooking and were then forgotten about.

Newer technologies in smoke alarms address many of these issues. Newer models come with a built-in lithium battery that lasts a decade. When the device begins to fail, it can easily be recycled and replaced with a new one. The battery compartment is sealed, which prevents the battery or batteries from being removed. In addition, a new standard for smoke detectors will go into effect in mid-2021 that increases the device's sensitivity to particulates released by the types of materials that are used in modern furnishings and that pose the greatest danger for asphyxiation, and reduces sensitivity to smoke from regular cooking that does not pose a danger. Although the new models the bill would require to be sold in the state after April 1, 2022, are slightly more expensive than models currently on the market, consumers are expected to save money over the device's lifespan due to not having to replace the battery. By some estimates, the savings could be as high as \$40 to \$60 per unit over the life of the device. In addition, having properly installed and working smoke detectors will save lives. As noted above, the bill would apply only to individual units that are battery operated and not to smoke alarm systems that are hardwired into a building (e.g., found in new construction) or that are wireless or Wi-Fi connected.

Against:

No arguments in opposition to the bill were raised in committee.

POSITIONS:

Representatives of the following entities testified in support of the bill (3-3-20):

- Michigan State Fire Inspectors Society
- Michigan State Firemen's Association

The Michigan Professional Fire Fighters Union indicated support for the bill. (3-3-20)

The Michigan Retailers Association indicated a neutral position on the bill. (3-3-20)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.