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Governor Baker Signs Legislation to Bolster Public Fire Safety

New commission tasked with working to prevent tragedies like the 2014 Beacon Street fire

BOSTON – Governor Charlie Baker today signed H.4455, An Act creating a special commission studying cutting, welding and hot work processes regulated by the State Fire Code, to prevent the loss of life resulting from tragedies such as the deadly nine-alarm brownstone fire on Beacon Street in March 2014. That fire, caused by welding on the building next door, put residents' lives at risk and took the lives of two Boston firefighters, Lieutenant Edward Walsh and Firefighter Michael Kennedy.

“Lieutenant Walsh and Firefighter Kennedy faced an enormously complex situation when they bravely entered the brownstone to fight the fire that tragically took their lives,” said Governor Charlie Baker. “I am proud to sign this bill into law to set in place appropriate regulations and licensing requirements for the safety of the public and our first responders.”

“Firefighters don’t always have complete information about the fires they are called to fight, so it is incumbent on us to take steps to reduce the risks they face by enacting sensible regulations in areas that can pose a serious threat to their safety,” said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito. “The work that this commission undertakes is of the utmost importance to combatting deadly fires and ensuring the future safety and well-being of firefighters and citizens across the Commonwealth.”

Under the new law, a special commission will be charged to investigate and study the current requirements for any licensing or permits governing cutting, welding, and other hot work processes that are capable of initiating fires or explosions to
determine if the industry is adequately regulated to protect the public. The commission will study the use of supervised details and fire watches, adequacy of fees for inspection and oversight, the deterrent effect of penalties for violations of rules and regulations, along with potential cost recovery and assessment for damages resulting from failure to comply with rules and regulations.

"Boston will forever remember the heroic acts of Lieutenant Edward Walsh and Firefighter Michael Kennedy, and I am hopeful that recommendations from this commission will help us prevent future tragedies," said Mayor Martin J. Walsh. I thank Senator Donnelly and Representative Collins for their partnership on this legislation and the Governor for signing it into law."

“Today, an individual can purchase a welding unit and go into business for himself without any education or certification requirements,” said State Fire Marshal Peter J. Ostroskey. “Recommendations from this commission will be extremely helpful to public safety as to whether training and certification should be required, whether we can strengthen or improve existing regulations or should increase penalties for violations.”

“This statute is the first step in ensuring that workers, the public and those whose job it is to protect the public are safe on jobs where welding and hot work takes place,” said State Senator Ken Donnelly. “The commission will determine the proper requirements and safeguards necessary in performing welding and hot work and I appreciate the support of the legislature and the governor in moving this important bill forward.”

"The safety of our first responders must always be a top priority," said State Representative Nick Collins. “It is my hope that this new fire safety commission will identify flaws in existing law and make recommendations to ensure oversight and restrictions are improved so tragedies like the 2014 Back Bay fire don't occur again."

The 11-member commission will include legislators, public safety professionals, and individuals in related construction trades. It will consist of two members of the Senate, two members of the House, the State Fire Marshal, the Commissioner of the Fire Department of the City of Boston and five members appointed by the Governor, with each appointee required to possess certain professional qualifications.

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