

Lake City home, a heat detector. Neither home, the NFPA asserts, adhered to the NFPA code. In fact, the association, which represents 25,000 firemen, fire departments, sprinkler manufacturers, smoke detector manufacturers among others, reports few fires have occurred in nursing homes that meet the code. The NFPA says it has case histories to back its statements.

As might be expected the truth probably lies somewhere between the assertions of the NFPA and the ANHA. Richard Bland, engineering professor at Pennsylvania State University and chairman of the President's Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, points out that sensors have the advantage of alerting people to a fire, whereas sprinklers do not. However detectors are predicated on nursing home staffs' being trained to evacuate residents and on residents' being able to move quickly—which is often not the case in nursing institutions. Nursing homes must also contend with patients' emotions. The NFPA has documented cases in

which patients tried to run back into burning homes after being evacuated, to rescue a cherished blanket or object. Yet while Bland agrees with the NFPA's position that only sprinklers will put a fire out, he affirms that temperatures needed to set off sprinklers are sometimes too high for patient safety. What is needed, Bland concludes, is a fire extinguishing system whose mission is life safety—and that nursing homes can comfortably afford.

Engineer Richard Patton has come up with a sprinkler system that would probably reduce costs of installation and water supply. Yet as the NFPA points out, even this system would not provide the ultimate in protection: a sprinkler that goes off as fast as a smoke sensor. They look forward to the achievement of this feat in the near future, however.

Also more basic scientific research into fire is needed, Bland asserts—into how two fires in one room interact and into how carpets, draperies and other furnishings might be made noncombustible without emitting toxic fumes. □

Economic prejudices and equal housing

Equal opportunity in housing was impeded for years by racial prejudices. But these attitudes are changing. In 1942 only 35 percent of white Americans said they would not mind having black neighbors. In 1968, 76 percent said they would not mind. The obstacle that remains is not racial or ethnic but economic. Poor families cannot afford to leave the inner city and move to the suburbs.

To study the problem the Department of Housing and Urban Development, whose goal it is to take affirmative action to provide equal opportunity in housing, called upon the Social Sciences Panel of the National Research Council's Advisory Committee to HUD. Retired diplomat George C. McGhee is chairman of the advisory committee and Amos Hawley of the University of North Carolina is chairman of its social sciences panel. Last week at the National Academy of Sciences building in Washington they presented the panel's findings and recommendations.

The report, which draws conclusions from existing research into racial and social mixing, states that there is much evidence to show that people of different races but of similar socioeconomic levels can live peacefully together in the same neighborhood. But it says little is known about whether people of different economic levels, regardless of race, can live together. "Simultaneous efforts to reduce racial segregation and class stratification may in fact be counter productive," it suggests. It recommends that emphasis of a policy of social diversity in housing should be on improving racial mixing among persons of similar economic levels. But wouldn't excessive economic stratification lead to economic (rather than racial) ghettos?

Acknowledging that possibility, Hawley and McGhee emphasized the importance of learning more about the feasibility of economic mixing in housing. They urged that high priority be given to carefully planned experiments to determine under what conditions residential mixing of people from different economic, as well as racial, backgrounds may prove most successful.

Recently HUD and the Office of Economic Opportunity have been giving high priority to racial and socioeconomic mixing in housing projects. Hawley mentioned one experiment (Columbia, Md.) that is having promising results. But based on the NRC study, Hawley says, "We are now telling [HUD and OEO] that there is no evidence to support success in these experiments and that much more research by social scientists is needed." □

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