



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Pettapiece introduces Rea and Walter Act to improve firefighter safety

(Perth-Wellington) – Firefighter safety is the focus of the Rea and Walter Act—a new bill introduced today in the Ontario legislature by Perth-Wellington MPP Randy Pettapiece.

The bill is named in honour of two North Perth Fire Service members, Ken Rea and Ray Walter, who lost their lives battling a fire in March 2011. If passed, the bill will help address one of the contributing factors in that tragedy: firefighters had no way of knowing the building used truss and lightweight construction.

“This is a common-sense proposal, and I’m optimistic MPPs of all parties will get behind it,” Pettapiece said. “It could even save lives.”

The bill would require most commercial and industrial buildings, as well as multi-family dwellings of three or more units (other than a townhouse), to display an emblem alerting fire crews to a building’s use of truss and lightweight construction.

“This is about making sure firefighters have the best possible information, as soon as they arrive on the scene. It will help them better assess the risk so they can decide how best to fight a fire,” noted Pettapiece.

The Rea and Walter Act is scheduled for debate and a vote in the legislature on April 6th. If it passes at that stage, it will move on to a committee to consider amendments. If the government approves it, the bill will later come back to the legislature for a final vote.

For years, many firefighters have said that truss- and lightweight-constructed buildings should be identified. In 2012, North Perth fire chief Ed Smith brought forward a resolution at the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC) to petition the provincial government to make it mandatory that all lightweight constructed buildings be placarded. The resolution carried in May 2012. In September 2016, O AFC passed a resolution supporting Pettapiece’s bill.

“Firefighters in our area and across the province support this idea,” Pettapiece said. “I’m grateful for all the advice and encouragement they provided.”

Many local municipalities already require buildings using truss and lightweight construction to post an emblem by their door. Pettapiece modeled his bill on existing bylaws in the City of Stratford and municipalities including West Perth, Perth East and Perth South.

The MPP worked with local firefighters to help craft the bill. He worked closely with fire chiefs including Chris Harrow (Minto), John Paradis (Stratford), Bill Hunter (Perth East & West Perth) and Ed Smith (North Perth). He also credited Mike Lukachko, who advocated for the Stratford bylaw.

Pettapiece has also met with fire officials in the Windsor, Kenora, Cobourg and Ottawa areas.

Tests conducted by the National Research Council of Canada show that the times to reach structural failure during a fire for truss and lightweight construction were 35-60% shorter than that for solid wood joist assembly. Structural failure can happen in as little as six minutes.

Pettapiece first announced his bill in August 2016, but it was delayed due to Premier Kathleen Wynne's September decision to prorogue the legislature.

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