903.2.7 Group R. An automatic sprinkler system installed in accordance with Section 903.3 shall be provided throughout all buildings with a Group R fire area.

Q: Do the provisions of Section 903.2.7 in the 2003 International Fire Code require automatic sprinkler systems to be installed in all one- and two-family dwellings?

A: No. The provisions of the International Fire Code are applicable only to one- and two-family dwelling buildings constructed under the International Building Code and classified in Group R-3 by that code. They do not apply to detached one- and two-family dwellings and multiple single-family dwellings (townhouses) not more than three stories in height with a separate means of egress constructed under the International Residential Code.

The ICC Board of Directors, in originally approving the development of the International Residential Code, indicated that it is to be a stand-alone code for the construction of detached one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses not more than three stories in height. The provisions for new construction that affect these type buildings are regulated exclusively by the International Residential Code and are not to be regulated by any other International Code. Section 101.2–Scope, Exception 1 of the International Building Code, stipulates that “Detached one- and two-family dwellings and multiple single-family dwellings (townhouses) not more than three stories above grade ... shall comply with the International Residential Code.” Likewise, Section R101.2–Scope of the International Residential Code states that “The provisions of the International Residential Code for One- and Two-Family Dwellings shall apply to the construction...of detached one- and two-family dwellings and multiple single-family dwellings (townhouses) not more than three stories in height with a separate means of egress and their accessory structures.” Therefore, the construction of detached one- and two-family dwellings and multiple single-family dwellings within the scope of the International Residential Code is not required to comply with the provisions of either the International Building Code or the International Fire Code.

Where a dwelling or townhouse exceeds the allowable height in stories, does not provide individual egress for each dwelling unit, or does not conform to the prescriptive provisions of the International Residential Code, the structures are then beyond the scope of that code and its provisions cannot be applied. The building must then meet the provisions of the International Building Code for Group R-3 as well as the applicable provisions of the International Fire Code.