



Sheet-metal showdown Nonunion shops leery of Deval Patrick's board

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Non-union contractors say Gov. **Deval Patrick** has stacked a new regulatory board with union members who are now writing key rules for the licensing of thousands of sheet-metal workers across the state. An attorney for the contractors has fired off a letter to Patrick objecting to the make-up of the new Board of Examiners of Sheet Metal Workers.

Meanwhile, the Associated Builders and Contractors of Massachusetts and Air Conditioning Contractors of America are raising funds for a possible legal showdown over who sits on the new licensing board.

The main complaint is that no representatives from non-union shops sit on the board - and non-union firms are worried they'll be saddled with expensive worker-training rules favored by unions, said Greg Beeman, president of the Associated Builders and Contractors.

"We support new (licensing) regulations," said Beeman. But small contractors can't afford some work training and education rules being considered by the board, he said.

But the Patrick administration, one board member and the legislative sponsor of the bill creating the board dismissed the complaints, saying they're following the law and only trying to hammer out comprehensive new licensing procedures for sheet-metal workers.

Lawmakers, reacting to a tragic restaurant fire that killed two Boston firefighters two years ago in West Roxbury, last year passed legislation requiring that sheet-metal workers be properly licensed. The fire at the Tai Ho Chinese restaurant was believed to have started in a grease-coated kitchen vent.

"The Board of Examiners of Sheet Metal Workers is comprised of experienced professionals in the field who bring to the board a strong mix of backgrounds, knowledge and industry insight," said George K. Weber, director of the Division of Professional Licensure.

The new board is now holding open meetings and seeking public input on future licensing procedures, said Weber in a statement.