

Springfield Republican

Sheet metal regulations hearing to draw critics

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By JIM KINNEY

SPRINGFIELD - A group representing non-union contractors plans to speak out at a public hearing today concerning proposed regulations of the sheet metal industry.

The state Division of Professional Licensure Boards will conduct a public hearing on the sheet metal regulations at 10:30 a.m. in Room B-42 of the state office building at 436 Dwight St.

Gov. Deval L. Patrick signed a law in 2008 creating a professional licensing system for sheet metal workers who fabricate and install duct work, kitchen range hoods, metal roofs and other metal structures. The law followed a fatal fire in Boston blamed on improperly built ventilation ducts, according to the state's Web site. Two other public hearings were held last week, on Tuesday in Malden and on Thursday in Quincy.

The regulations will apply to commercial and government buildings and most residential construction.

But Charles D. Chieppo, a spokesman for a consortium of non-union building contractors called the Coalition for Fair Licensing, said some of the proposed licensing requirements are unfair. He pointed to one requirement that there be three experienced sheet metal workers on the job site for every apprentice, as an example.

"What this is all designed to do is to force the union cost structure on non-union companies," he said. "You hear sheet metal and it's not sexy. But this is going to effect everybody."

George K. Weber, director of the state Division of Professional Licensure, said every effort has been made in the proposed regulations to balance the needs of union and non-union segments of the industry. He said regulations might be in place as soon as 60 days from now.

Mark W. Andrews, business representative for Sheet Metal Workers Local 63 in Central and Western Massachusetts, said there are non-union contractors who offer the on-the-job and classroom training that would be required under the proposed regulations.

"It's really got nothing to do with union or non-union, it's about protecting the consumer," he said. "It's about public safety."

Andrews said high school programs such as those at Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical High School in Springfield and William J. Dean Technical High School in Holyoke give students a start toward getting a license.

Local 63 has 600 working members in Central and Western Massachusetts and in Vermont. Andrews said at least 20 percent of them are out of work right now due to a slump in new construction.