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IAPMO Contributes to Stronger Medical Gas Standards in Kansas

Topeka, Kan. (May 13, 2010) — Kansas Gov. Mark Parkinson has signed Senate Bill 449 (SB 449) into law in response to a devastating medical gas accident last March at a dental facility in Lawrence, Kan. The new law, which was developed with guidance from IAPMO Region 4 Director Bill Schweitzer, amends existing law with regard to the repair, maintenance and inspection of medical gas piping systems in Kansas.

The new legislation requires that all such work must be performed only by a person licensed to perform plumbing work according to a city's or country's statute and who is certified under the appropriate professional qualifications of the American Society of Sanitary Engineering's (ASSE) Series 6000 standard. Installers are now required to obtain a proper permit from the country or city where the medical gas installation will be performed.

Furthermore, SB 449 requires all inspections of medical gas piping systems to be performed by a certified third party agency and all necessary documentation to be submitted to the city or country before the facility where the system has been installed is occupied.

Austin Stone, the young man whose life was dramatically altered by a cross-connection between oxygen and nitrous oxide gas supply lines during a routine visit to a new dental facility for the removal of his wisdom teeth, attended the signing ceremony along with his family. As a result of the accident, Stone, who was a high school senior at the time, is blind, 60 percent deaf and has difficulty speaking and walking.

"This senseless and completely avoidable tragedy was caused by a contractor who installed medical gas without certified plumbers, without an inspection and without any permits," said Schweitzer, who argued unsuccessfully prior to the accident for the Lawrence City Council to renew the *Uniform Plumbing Code*[®] (*UPC*) and *Uniform Mechanical Code*[®] (*UMC*), both of which include the provisions Gov. Parkinson has now signed into Kansas State law. "I thank Gov. Parkinson for signing this bill and giving all Kansans protection from any more incidents like what happened to Mr. Stone. Everyone involved with this bill will remember this young man and wish him and his family the best."

In 2007, the City of Lawrence switched from the *UPC* to the International Plumbing Code (IPC), a decision made by the City Commission despite formal opposition from the City's Board of Plumbers and Pipe Fitters. At the hearings leading up to this decision, Schweitzer warned commissioners that the IPC refers contractors/inspectors to another code, NFPA 99C, which is the standard for medical gas, but does not include a correlation between the installer and the city/county. Many believe this gap is partly to blame for the accident in Lawrence. The *UPC*, on the other hand, requires that permits be pulled and calls for inspections and documents from a third party prior to issuance of an occupancy permit.

Schweitzer and a group of licensed plumbing professionals, including Kirk Miller, UA Local 441, Topeka, Denis Wittman, UA Local 441, Lawrence, and Rich Schaefer, Professional Medical Specialties, Inc., worked with Kansas Rep. John Grange (R-75), Rep. Connie O'Brien (R-42), Dustin Hardison, Policy Director for Kansas House Democrats, and Rep. Paul Davis (D-46), the House Democratic Leader, to craft the language of SB 449 and get it passed.

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