

Fire Commissioners Column.....

Bill Madison

Did you know that the Federal government requires that when their employees travel on official government business that they must stay in a hotel or motel that is protected by a fire sprinkler system? Surviving a fire in a building that has sprinklers is much more likely than in a structure that is not fire sprinkler protected. Ever wonder why most commercial buildings, schools, theaters, warehouses have sprinklers and most homes do not?

Some of the reasons have to do with local fire codes, insurance ratings and costs. Fire sprinklers in commercial buildings began over 100 years ago in the large mills in New England when a series of fires caused large losses of life and millions of dollars of property damage.

Today this technology is becoming more and more common in single family dwellings. Not only have costs of installing sprinklers in the home dramatically declined but developers have realized that they are allowed to add more homes per acre if they are protected by sprinklers. New home sprinkler systems are architecturally attractive and are completely safe. It's now feasible to not only have a fire alarm system to alert you of a fire in your house but also a residential sprinkler system to put the fire out, even if no one is home. When you consider that in the U.S. we average nearly 400,000 house fires each year with over 3,000 civilian deaths it makes sense to consider installing fire sprinklers in homes.

Test Your Home Sprinkler System's I.Q.

Here are five statements about home sprinkler systems. Are they true or false?

- 1. When one sprinkler goes off, all the sprinklers activate.**
False! Only the sprinkler over the fire will activate. The sprinkler heads react to temperatures in each room individually. Thus, fire in a bedroom will activate only the sprinkler in that room.
- 2. A sprinkler could accidentally go off, causing severe water damage to a home.**
False! Records, which have been compiled for well over 50 years, prove the likelihood of this occurring is very remote. Furthermore, home sprinklers will be specifically designed and will be rigorously tested to minimize such accidents.
- 3. Water damage from a sprinkler system will be more extensive than fire damage.**
False! The sprinkler system will severely limit a fire's growth. Therefore, damage from a home sprinkler system will be much less severe than the smoke and fire

damage if the fire had gone on unabated or even the water damage caused by water from firefighting hose lines.

4. **Home sprinkler systems are expensive.**

False! Current estimates suggest that when a home is under construction, a home sprinkler system could cost less than 1% of the total building price.

5. **Residential sprinkles are ugly.**

False! The traditional, commercial-type sprinklers as well as sprinklers for home use are now being designed to fit in with most any decor.

You can see from this information why some communities have already instituted local ordinances requiring residential sprinklers in all new home construction. Scottsdale, Arizona has required the since 1986! Additionally, homeowners save 15% or more on their fire insurance. I understand that we have one home currently under construction in our district that is installing sprinklers. If you are building or doing a major renovation, you should seriously consider residential fire sprinklers.