

**FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 147: 1911
(SPRINKLER SYSTEM MAINTENANCE)**

By Richard Schulte

The issue of the reliability of sprinkler protection has been a frequent topic of discussion over the last 20 years or so, but, based upon the record, this issue is not new. The issue of the maintenance of sprinkler protection was a topic of discussion even in 1911. The following is a transcript of the Report of Committee presented by the chairman of the Automatic Sprinkler Committee at the fifteenth Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association held in 1911:

“The Chair: The next report is that of the Committee on Automatic Sprinklers, Mr. E. P. Boone, Chairman.

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON
AUTOMATIC SPRINKLERS.**

E. P. BOONE, Chairman,

A. Blauvelt, H. E. Burdette, E. U. Crosby, J. E. Curtis, Gorham Dana, L. W. Evans, T. Z. Franklin, H. C. Henley, L. H. Kunhardt, F. J. McFadden, Lee McKenzie, F. C. Moore, H. L. Phillips, M. D. Pierce, J. C. Richters, G. M. Robertson, W. C. Robinson, W. G. Sanderson, E. Schuenemann, C. L. Scofield, P. D. C. Steward, W. A. Stoney, J. R. Sullivan, R. Sweetland, C. A. Trowbridge, W. S. Wensley.

As chairman of the automatic sprinkler committee I can only report at this time but slight progress in revising the rules. Such changes as have been suggested are minor; and not of sufficient importance to warrant action by the Association at this meeting.

Your chairman embraces this opportunity to say a few words regarding the desirability of having automatic sprinkler equipments installed in strict accordance with the present rules. Every detail should be carefully followed, in order that an installation upon completion may give the desired result.

This is brought to your attention mainly for the reason that in a number of municipalities the question of passing laws making automatic sprinkler protection compulsory in buildings of certain forms of construction and occupancies, and located in congested districts is now receiving marked attention. Your chairman sincerely hopes that where such obtains, members will use their efforts to have none other than the rules and requirements of this Association for the installation of automatic sprinklers adopted by those municipalities, or at least made the basis of their rules.

Too much importance cannot be laid upon the maintenance problem, for in proper maintenance depends the value of an equipment, and I, therefore, urge upon those members of this Association, whose duties bring them more or less in contact with the owner, lessee or superintendent of properties equipped with automatic sprinklers, the necessity of giving thereto proper instructions regarding care and maintenance of the equipment.

Reference to the list of unsatisfactory sprinkler fires given in the Quarterly will emphasize the importance of this question. If we could only keep the gate valves open, tanks full, pumps always ready for service, how different would the record of so-called sprinkler failures appear.

Lastly, may I ask that those of you who are members of this Association, those of you who are not members, but ought to be, give to the chairman of this committee by November 1, 1911, the benefit of your ideas and suggestions tending toward improvement in the present rules.

Particularly is your opinion desired on the question of concealed piping and field testing of devices and systems.

The Chair: Gentlemen, you have heard the report of your committee on automatic sprinklers, advocating no change in the established specifications at this time and making some very important and timely suggestions as to the enforcement of the present specifications. What is your pleasure in the matter of the report?

A Member: I would like to ask the chairman of the committee if he has considered changing the rules to require that dead ends of sprinkler lines be blown out individually before the sprinkler system is put into service?

Mr. Boone: The matter of blowing out sprinkler pipe systems has been given attention and a ruling to cover that is now under consideration. Undoubtedly in the revision you will find a rule taking care of that.

It was voted to accept the report of the committee.”

Maintenance of any fire protection system, whether it be sprinkler protection, structural fire protection, compartmentation or egress systems, is and always will be an issue by the very nature of the systems. Large uncontrolled fires in buildings are rare events, hence, fire protection systems are expected to perform after sitting dormant for years. Given this, it shouldn't be a surprise that maintenance is an issue. The lack of required maintenance of any fire protection systems only becomes obvious when there is a fire.

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