

FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 182: 1916 (SPRINKLER PROTECTION/SCHOOL BUILDINGS)

By Richard Schulte

While sprinkler protection was developed for property protection purposes, the statistics collected on sprinkler protection by the National Fire Protection Association clearly showed that sprinklers were also capable of providing protection for building occupants. The following is an excerpt of a discussion on school fire safety design which addresses the use of sprinkler protection in school buildings:

Mr. H. O. Lacount, Boston, (Associated Factory Mutual Fire Insurance Companies): Mr. President, the discussion would seem to indicate that if a fire starts it will make considerable headway before the firemen arrive. The speakers have not emphasized very emphatically the value of the automatic sprinkler. I would like to call attention to a bit of experience. There are about 3,000 industrial plants, the largest plants in this country, protected by automatic sprinklers, in which there are working every day about one and a half million people. A good proportion of these plants are textile factories in which fire, if it should start, would naturally spread rapidly. These buildings are not well provided with exits, and yet in thirty-five years the loss of life due to fires reaches the large total of five!

Mr. John F. Ancona, Rochester (Eastman Kodak Company): I have not the exact figures, and will have to depend on my recollection but I would like briefly to state a few facts in regard to sprinkler protection in some schools. The city of Buffalo has installed sprinklers in forty or fifty schools, and as I remember it the local Board of Education stated that this was done to prevent loss of life by fire. Jamestown has about twelve schools that are sprinklered; Binghamton has either twelve or sixteen, and Amsterdam has nine. These sprinklers were installed throughout the basements only. The buildings were of wooden construction, each having a basement, and in three cases out of four, as I recollect it, the installation was demanded by ordinances enacted by the municipal authorities. Three out of the four Boards of Education stated in a communication on the subject that the sprinklers were not installed to reduce the insurance rate or for any financial purpose, but were put in purely under the impression that they would greatly reduce the hazard to the children in the building. I would like to ask if Mr. Ittner has done anything in St. Louis to protect his wooden buildings with the automatic sprinkler?

Mr. Ittner: We have installed no sprinkler systems in the St. Louis schools as yet. We depend rather upon the safety of our buildings; in erecting low buildings having large hallways; providing ample stairways and exits, and, above all, irreproachable housekeeping.

Mr. W. O. Teague, Boston (Factory Mutual Laboratories): The value of the automatic sprinkler as a life saver is so well known and admitted that further emphasis is scarcely necessary; but it is interesting to know that sprinklers are installed on some ocean liners, Sound steamers and river boats for protection to life. It seems to me that special application of the sprinkler might be considered a valuable testimonial.

By 1916, the capability of sprinkler protection to protect the building occupants from fire had clearly been recognized. While discussions over the capabilities of sprinkler protection to provide protection for building occupants continues even today, a century of statistics on fire fatalities in sprinklered buildings clearly demonstrates that sprinkler protection provides both the best protection for property and for the occupants of buildings.

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