

**FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 213: 1899  
(SPRINKLER SYSTEM FIRE DEPARTMENT CONNECTIONS)**

By Richard Schulte

The third Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association was held in Boston, Massachusetts in mid-June, 1899. Among the topics discussed at this meeting was the subject of the use of the sprinkler system fire department connection by the fire department. The following is the transcript of this discussion:

***“FIRE CHIEFS CONVENTION.***

*The report of the Committee appointed to attend the convention of the International Association of Fire Engineers was presented by Mr. Robinson, who said:*

*At the last annual meeting of this Association, held in Chicago in June, 1898, the President was authorized to appoint a committee to attend the annual convention of the International Association of Fire Engineers.*

*This convention was held in St. Louis, October 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st, 1898, and your committee have the honor to submit the following report:*

*The object of the Committee, as defined in the resolutions authorizing their appointment, was to promote a sentiment amongst the delegates to the convention favorable to the use of steamer connections to sprinkler systems by fire chiefs, in case of fire in sprinkled risks, and an alarm calling the fire department to the scene.*

*To further the interests of the object in view, a practical test of the value of steamer connections to sprinkler systems was made. A frame shed 60 x 30 feet was erected, enclosed on two adjacent sides, and a sprinkler equipment of 34 sprinklers was installed therein in the regular manner. A large quantity of light inflammable material was piled in the shed, a barrel of coal oil spread over the mass, and set on fire.*

When the entire structure and contents were well on fire, but before its utter destruction by the flames, a signal was given to the fire department to couple to the hose connections to the sprinkler system. Two lines were thus coupled from one steamer of about 900 gallons capacity per minute, and the water was thrown on the flames under good fire pressure through the entire number of 34 sprinklers. The deadening effect of the water thus distributed in the mass of flames was almost instantly apparent, and within fifteen seconds the fire was fully under control. *The immediate and effective value of the water thus distributed on a fire which had attained such a considerable degree of heat was a source of considerable surprise to most of the fire chiefs who witnessed the test.*

In order to secure official action by the convention acknowledging the value and recommending the use of steamer connections to sprinkler equipments, the following resolution was prepared by your Committee and presented to the convention by Chief George C. Hale of Kansas City:

Whereas, The ordinary automatic sprinkler system has proven itself a serviceable auxiliary apparatus, and

Whereas, *The practice of attaching hose to sprinkler systems has been a success in several cities, notably by the St. Louis Fire Department, who have also shown this convention an excellent exhibition demonstrating the value of fire department aid to sprinkler, and*

Whereas, The number of buildings equipped with sprinklers is increasing, and

Whereas, The attaching of hose to sprinkler does not sensibly delay or interfere with the use of ordinary apparatus at the same time.

Resolved, That it is the sense of this convention that *fire departments* should familiarize themselves with such buildings as are equipped with sprinklers, and for fire *should utilize the hose connections as early as possible.*

*The resolution was defeated by a vote of 38 to 37; some of the delegates stated that they voted in opposition because they believed the resolution arbitrary.*

Your Committee believe, however, that a good impression has been made and if the matter is brought before the next convention, which will be held in Columbus, Ohio, it will meet with success.

The Committee desire to express their obligations to Chief Swingley of St. Louis for courtesies extended, also for his valuable paper on "*The Benefits and Advantages of Automatic Sprinkler Systems,*" read before the convention.

The Committee is also indebted to Mr. Albert Blauvelt, Superintendent of Surveys for the Western Factory Insurance Association, for his untiring efforts and efficient assistance in preparing for the test and throughout the convention.

The Committee was represented at the convention by its entire membership.

*Voted, That the report be accepted and printed in the proceedings, and that the committee be continued.*

**Mr. Lemmon.** *I want to suggest to the delegates present that if they will use the influence they have in their jurisdictions, respecting this matter, great advantage may result. I hope to be able to make a good report from Newark.*

**Mr. Robinson.** *That, undoubtedly, would be a valuable aid, and if the members from the various cities would interview their chiefs, and describe the attitude the insurance men take on the question, it would, perhaps, lead to favorable action at the next convention. Since the last meeting of the Association, held in Chicago, we have obtained an absolute order to the fire department from Chief Swingley, in St. Louis, requiring this to be obeyed in every case, and, I think, in three or four cases, it has been very valuable in extinguishing the fire."*

Apparently, the use of the sprinkler system fire department connection by the fire department to support the operation of a sprinkler system and augment the water supply to the sprinkler system was a controversial issue in 1899.

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**Source:** *"Proceedings of the Third Annual [NFPA] Meeting"*, Boston, Massachusetts, 1899.

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