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## A PERSPECTIVE ON NATURAL DISASTERS AND FIRES

By Richard Schulte

An Associated Press article titled "*Mother Nature inflicts losses of \$35 billion on U.S. in 2011*" dated September 5, 2011 includes the following excerpt:

*"Total weather losses top \$35 billion, and that's not counting Hurricane Irene, according to the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration. There have been more than 700 U.S. disaster and weather deaths, most from the tornado outbreaks this spring."*

A report titled "*Fire Loss In The United States During 2009*" authored by Michael J. Karter, Jr. of the Fire Analysis and Research Division of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) dated August 2010 includes the following statistics on fire losses in the United States in 2009:

- An estimated total of 3,010 civilian fire fatalities occurred in the U.S.
- There were an estimated 480,500 structure fires.
- An estimated 2,695 civilian fire fatalities were caused by structure fires.
- 96 percent of the fire fatalities in structure fires occurred in (non-sprinklered) residential occupancies.
- An estimated 105 civilian fire fatalities occurred as a result of structure fires in commercial (non-residential) occupancies.
- Fires in the U.S. caused an estimated \$12.531 billion in property damage in 2009.

Based upon the data above, it can be stated that the property losses caused by natural disasters in 2011 will be more than triple the property losses caused by fire in 2009. (It should be noted that the loss data cited above has not been adjusted for inflation, but still the information cited provides a useful perspective on natural disaster property losses versus property losses caused by fire.)

In addition, it can be stated that fatalities caused by natural disasters in 2011 will be more than 7 times that caused by fires in commercial structures in 2009.

In other words, property losses caused by natural disasters, which are considered to be acts of God, far exceed the property losses caused by fire in the United States and fatalities caused by natural disasters far exceeds the number of civilian fatalities caused by structural fires in commercial (non-residential) occupancies.

*“There have been more than 700 U.S. disaster and weather deaths, most from the tornado outbreaks this spring.”*

Given this perspective, it would seem that, perhaps, we have achieved our fire safety goals for the United States, at least in commercial occupancies, and that we need to move onto other more pressing safety concerns.

We can expect that the number of civilian fire fatalities in the U.S., as well as the number of annual fire fighter fatalities, will continue to drop as the number of residential dwellings units protected by a sprinkler system in the United States increases.

Although we can't control the weather, we can control the level of fire safety provided for our citizens and the most effective means of providing a high level of fire safety for our citizens is to provide sprinkler protection in our buildings.

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