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SPRINKLER PROTECTION PERFORMANCE IN NORTHERN ILLINOIS

By Richard Schulte

Despite the evidence that sprinkler protection is a highly reliable form of building fire protection, lobbyists for the trade association representing the manufacturers of passive fire protection, the Alliance for Fire and Smoke Containment and Control (AFSCC), are still keeping busy questioning the reliability of sprinkler systems. While anecdotal evidence does not, in any way, provide statistical data on the reliability of sprinkler systems, anecdotal evidence can still be used to demonstrate the capability of sprinklers to both control and extinguish fires and to also limit smoke generation.

The following are just a few selected excerpts of anecdotal evidence on sprinkler performance collected by the Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board (NIFSAB) on sprinkler system operation in Chicago and suburban Chicago. The source of this information is a document titled “*Successful Activations*” (2011 edition). This document is 45 pages in length.

Sacred Heart School, Lombard, Illinois

August 2002

Lombard fire companies responded to an activated fire alarm at Sacred Heart School. The first engine company discovered a water flow alarm with a sprinkler head activated in the upper hall kitchen. There was a fire in the old kitchen area which was being controlled by a single sprinkler head that had activated. . . Chief George Seagraves

Senior Citizens Facility, Calumet City, Illinois

September 2002

A single sprinkler successfully extinguished an incendiary fire caused by an accelerant in an apartment unit of the three story wood frame facility. . . Damage was confined to contents in the apartment. Some drywall had to be replaced. Deputy Chief Dan Smits

Dwelling, Long Grove, Illinois

October 2002

A structure fire in a home under construction in the Preserves of Long Grove was completely extinguished by a residential fire sprinkler system. The million-dollar home sustained \$600 damage in the garage area. . . Two sprinklers activated and fully extinguished the fire. . . Chief James D. Spiegel

Great American Bagel, Westmont, Illinois

January 2003

“Two sprinklers activated and helped control the fire and put the fire out,” Skala said. Chief Frank Trout, Westmont Fire Department

Lexington Nursing Home, Orland Park, Illinois

January 2003

“A single sprinkler prevented a fire from spreading at the Lexington Nursing Home where 249 senior citizens currently reside. Firefighters from the Orland Fire Protection District arrived at the scene and found a fire [in] a dryer. They extinguished the remaining fire with a dry chemical extinguisher. . . Chief Bob Buhs, Orland Fire Protection District

Golden Gate Restaurant, Palatine Illinois

August 2003

When firefighters responded to an alarm at 1:19 a.m., the sprinkler system was way ahead of them. A single sprinkler had extinguished a blaze that started in the electric room. . . Fire Chief Hank Clemmensen, Palatine Rural Fire Protection District.

Ronald Re[a]gan Museum, Eureka, Illinois

September 2003

A fire sprinkler system extinguished flames and protected artifacts at the Eureka College’s Ronald Re[a]gan Museum in September. Fire officials believe arson caused a fire. . .

Stroger Hospital, Chicago, Illinois

October 2003

A fire was reported about 1:45 a.m. at Stroger Hospital of Cook County on the 7th floor of the Medical and Surgical Unit. The blaze began in bedding materials and one report indicated it might have been started by a patient smoking. Fire sprinklers in the room of origin contained the fire. . . The unit was evacuated, along with adjoining floors. No injuries were reported.

Shopping Center, Glen Ellyn, Illinois

October 2003

A single fire sprinkler prevented fire from spreading at Binny's Beverage Depot at Pickwick Place Shopping Center. . . Clark said the 50,000 sq. ft. building was built in 1968 and retrofitted with sprinklers as result of the Village of Glen Ellyn's sprinkler ordinance. Chief Scott Raffensparger, Glen Ellyn Volunteer Fire Department

Based upon the above, it is not unreasonable to conclude that sprinklers often times not only extinguish fires prior to the arrival of the fire fighters, but also prevent smoke inhalation injuries. We certainly can't say the same about passive fire protection features.

Claddagh Irish Pub, Geneva, Illinois

December 2003

Fire sprinklers quickly extinguished a small grease fire in the kitchen at the Claddagh Irish Pub at around 9 p.m. . . No injuries were reported. The Pub was cleaned and open for business the next morning. Damage was estimated at \$3,000. Chief Steven Olson, Geneva Fire Department

Ligo Products, Mokena, Illinois

December 2003

Fire caused by an electrical arc was contained to a 400 square foot area by single sprinkler head activation. . . Fire Chief Ted Golden, Mokena Fire Protection District

Just the few excerpts cited above indicate that sprinklers are capable of not only controlling fires, but, in many cases, sprinklers also extinguish fires prior to the arrival of fire fighters. It should also be noted that sprinklers are effective in controlling smoke and preventing injuries too.

In other words, the contention that sprinklers do not extinguish fires and cannot prevent smoke inhalation injuries advanced by the lobbyists for the AFSCC is, well, inaccurate.

Do sprinklers always work? Do sprinklers always extinguish a fire prior to the arrival of fire fighters? Do sprinklers prevent all smoke inhalation injuries? The answer to all three of these questions is no, but sprinkler protection is a highly reliable form of building fire protection.

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