

FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 134: 1906 (NFPA RESOLUTIONS-SPRINKLER PROTECTION)

By Richard Schulte

The tenth Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) was held in Chicago in May 1906. Included in the discussions held at this meeting was the consideration of a resolution which recommended the installation of sprinkler protection with a private water supply as a means of addressing the general fire problem in the United States, as well as the problem of conflagrations in major cities. The following is the text of the resolution which was adopted by the NFPA at its Annual Meeting:

“RESOLUTIONS

WHEREAS, The National Fire Protection Association was formed ten years ago "to promote the science and improve the methods of fire protection; to obtain and circulate information on this subject, and to secure the co-operation of its members in establishing proper safeguards against loss of life and property by fire;" and,

WHEREAS, In spite of all efforts up to the present time, the terrible fire waste of this country has continued uninterrupted, involving a loss per capita several times greater than other countries; and,

WHEREAS, Public protection has not kept pace with the growth of buildings and increase of valuation in congested centers, and as the business conditions and prosperity of the country are less liable to interruption if this increasing loss can be checked; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, by The National Fire Protection Association, in convention assembled, That an urgent appeal be and is hereby made to all interests, to cooperate in bringing about better conditions by adopting improved methods of construction, by safeguarding hazards of occupancy, and by introducing automatic sprinklers and other private protection with private water supplies, quite in addition to public fire service; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we recommend that municipalities pass ordinances involving the adoption of an approved building code along the lines of the building code recommended by the National Board of Fire Underwriters, and requiring the introduction of automatic sprinklers with private water supplies, in buildings of special occupancy and in so-called congested districts, to the end that the danger of sweeping conflagrations may be largely eliminated.”

The resolution adopted by the members of the National Fire Protection Association at the tenth Annual Meeting in 1906 is of great interest, first, because the resolution recommends the installation of sprinkler protection and, second, because the resolution provides an indication of the rationale for the recommendation that two water supplies for a sprinkler system be provided.

The obvious rationale for the recommendation that at least two water supplies be provided for a sprinkler installation is to increase the reliability of the water supply for a sprinkler system, however, the statement that sprinkler protection should be provided to address the conflagration issue is the basis for recommending that sprinkler protection should be provided with a private supply. Obviously, it can be expected that the municipal water supply will be depleted under conflagration conditions, hence, sprinkler protection supplied solely by the municipal distribution system will be of little value under conflagration conditions.

In 1906, it was already known that sprinkler protection was not only capable of providing protection for a building from fire within the building, but also from an exposure fire. Hence, providing sprinkler protection with an adequate private supply could also be of great value under conflagration conditions. It could be expected that sprinkler protection with its own water supply could prevent exposure fires from spreading into sprinklered buildings, thereby reducing the work of fire fighters. With sprinkler protection provided with a private water supply in most buildings in congested areas of cities, the likelihood of fire spread between multiple buildings would be unlikely, even in the event of interruptions of the municipal water supply.

Of course, with the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire (which was initiated by an earthquake in the early morning of April 18th, 1906) and the Great Baltimore Fire (which occurred on February 7 and 8, 1904) fresh in everyone’s memory, it should be no surprise that means to prevent future conflagrations were of interest at this NFPA meeting in 1906.

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Richard C. Schulte

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