

# SCHULTE & ASSOCIATES

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## **FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 58: 1908 (TWELFTH ANNUAL NFPA MEETING/ COMMITTEE ON AUTOMATIC SPRINKLERS REPORT)**

By Richard Schulte

The twelfth meeting of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), held in Chicago in late May, 1908, included a presentation of the report issued by the Committee on Automatic Sprinklers. The following is the text of the Committee report and the discussion which followed:

### **“REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON AUTOMATIC SPRINKLERS.**

*E. U. CROSBY, CHAIRMAN.  
435 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.*

*W. A. Anderson,  
A. Blauvelt,  
E. P. Boone,  
H. E. Burdette,  
J. E. Curtis,  
Gorham Dana,  
H. A. Fiske,  
T. Z. Franklin,*

*H. C. Henley,  
Chas. S. Kremer,  
L. H. Kunhardt,  
F. J. McFadden,  
Lee McKenzie,  
F. C. Moore,  
J. T. Naylor,  
H. L. Phillips,*

*M. D. Pierce,  
G. M. Robertson,  
W. C. Robinson,  
W. G. Sanderson,  
R. Sweetland,  
C. A. Trowbridge,  
W. S. Wensley.*

*The Secretary: I have received the following communication from the Chairman of that Committee (reading):*

*The Committee on Automatic Sprinklers met in New York on November 20<sup>th</sup>, last, and considered numerous changes to sprinkler rules as suggested by members of the National Fire Protection Association and by sprinkler equipment companies. It was found that while some of the recommendations appeared reasonable, none of them seemed of particular importance, and the committee subsequently by mail voted as follows:*

*“In view of the excellent experience with sprinkler equipments installed under the existing rules, and the fact that none of the recommendations for change appear to be of vital importance, and because admittedly, it is undesirable to change the rules frequently for comparatively trivial improvements, it is considered unwise by this committee to recommend any change in the Rules and Requirements for Sprinkler Equipments at the forthcoming annual meeting of the National Fire Protection Association.”*

*E. U. CROSBY, Chairman.*

*The Chair: Gentlemen, you have heard the report; what action will you take?*

*Mr. Hexamer: Mr. President, I move you that the report be received and the recommendation adopted.*

*Motion seconded.*

*Mr. Fiske: I think this is a very important subject and it seems to me it would be advisable to have a little discussion on it. The committee was not unanimous in this report; in fact, I think there were some who felt that some of the proposed changes submitted to the committee were of considerable importance. As we know, it was voted not to change the sprinkler rules oftener than once in three years. The sprinkler art is not an antiquated one as yet and we are bound to run into more or less desirable changes. They may not be vital, but if important in the general work, I think it might be found desirable to make changes oftener than once in three years. Personally, I was sorry to have that action taken, for there were some changes which would improve the rules in their details. I think it would be entirely proper for the Association to discuss the question and to express to the committee its feeling as to the matter of taking this up another year. The important matters, it is true, were settled, but there are many important minor details which should be acted upon. I would like to hear opinion expressed as to whether it is desired to have a report next year.*

*Mr. Hexamer: Mr. President, even if it is correct that a motion was adopted providing that no changes should be made in the sprinkler rules for three years, that does not prevent discussion of proposed changes in this meeting and the bringing of changes recommend to the next meeting for adoption. I think action could be taken this year to go into effect next year.*

*Mr. Dana: I second Mr. Fiske's idea on this matter –*

*The Chair: He did not make a motion, as I understand.*

*Mr. Dana: I second his idea. (Laughter.) I agree with him that there were a considerable number of members of the committee who favored minor changes, and I believe personally they should be made. I believe there are a number of inconsistencies in the rules and a number of points which need further explanation. While I do not think any radical changes are needed, I do think some minor changes of wording, etc., would make the rules easier and cleared to handle. I trust the matter will be discussed and permission given, if necessary, to make such changes during the coming year.*

*The Chair: The question is upon the acceptance of this report.*

*Mr. W. J. Frederick: Mr. President, I believe you ruled that we could not accept a report which was not unanimous. I think, Mr. Fiske stated that the members of this committee were not unanimous on this report.*

*Mr. Fiske: I do not think there ever was such a rule in the Association, providing that a committee report must be unanimous.*

*Mr. Hexamer: Mr. President, I call on the Secretary for a statement.*

*The Secretary: I do not think there is any rule requiring a unanimous report; but I think it has been the custom of the Association for a number of years to refuse to receive a report which had not been thoroughly discussed in committee meeting and an agreement reached by members of the committee. By one or two experiences in the Association's history it was brought out that certain members of committees had attempted to handle matters by correspondence, which resulted in much discussion on the floor, principally engaged in by the members of the committee. It was therefore thought best to require that the matters should be discussed by the members of the committee beforehand and brought before the Association in the form of a report, or majority and minority reports, if desired.*

*Mr. Goddard: I did not object to the ruling which the Chair made in regard to the Celluloid report, but since the point is brought up on the floor of the Association, on the proposition that a report cannot be received unless it is unanimous, I will have to enter a most decided protest. Personally, I cannot see any difference in the status of these two reports. It seems to me that what the Association did do, as I recall it, was to go on record as requiring a committee report should be submitted to the members of the committee and that committee should be ready to make a report before any report should be received by the Association. Now, this report may be a majority or a minority report. It may be the Chairman will state that there are differences of opinion among the member of the committee but that the majority are in favor of the report; and in other cases, while there may be no agreement among the minority members, they may object to different things. I do not think there is a better time to settle that point, as a precedent for future rulings, than right now.*

*I do not think Mr. Hexamer meant, when he objected to receiving the report offer by Mr. Dana, that this Association could not receive a report unless it had received the endorsement of a majority, or the unanimous endorsement of the committee. This Association can accept any report, as long as it is a committee report and not the report of the Chairman. This Association does not care to have its time occupied in a discussion of details because of the failure of the Chairman of a committee to get the matter ready in time for presentation to the other members and secure action on it before the meeting. I do not think anyone could say the report of the Sprinkler Committee is not fully in order at this time, because it has been submitted to the members and a vote taken upon it; and we have no other authority than Mr. Fiske that there is a difference of opinion among the members of the committee. The Chairman says nothing about a minority report, but simply present the report to the committee. Surely the Chair will rule that that report is clearly in order to be acted upon now.*

*The Chair: I will say that I understood Mr. Hexamer's objection to be that the Celluloid report was not the report of the committee. In this case it is the report of the committee. In this case it is the report of the committee, and I am ready to receive any amendments to it. In the first case, I believe, the committee did not know the report was to be made and had no chance to make a minority report.*

*Mr. Fiske: The only question is as to whether the Association desires to consider the matter of changes, and to recommend that such changes as may be found desirable be presented at the next meeting. I think the committee would like to know how the Association feels.*

*Mr. Frederick: I do not like to see my friend Fiske doubted. Mr. Goddard said that it had not been stated by any authority other than Mr. Fiske that there was a lack of agreement among the member of this committee. That is sufficient for me. In the other case, we had no other word than Mr. Dana's that there was disagreement. I am willing to accept Mr. Fiske's statement.*

*Mr. Phillips: In the case of the report on automatic sprinkler rules, the committee held a meeting, acted on certain resolutions, passed this resolution, and the report has been forward by the Chairman of the committee as being the majority report of that committee. I do not know what the vote was by mail. In the case of the Celluloid report, the Chairman prepared a draft and sent it to the members by mail, but the members of the committee did not have an opportunity to meet and consider it; and the report which the Chairman reported was not a majority report and was not concurred in by all the members of the committee. I think there is a clear distinction.*

*Mr. Frederick: Does a majority report have to be concurred in by all the members?*

*Mr. Stone: I think it is unfortunate that the word "majority" report has been used. There is no such thing as a majority report. That report has been submitted to the members and the Chairman makes the report of the committee.*

*The Chair: The question before the house now is on the adoption of this report, and the recommendation made therein. If there is no amendment offered, I will put the question.*

*Motion adopted.*

*The Chair: We will now hear the report of the Sub-committee on Open Sprinklers, to be presented by Mr. Fiske.*

**Source:** *Proceedings of the National Fire Protection Association, 1907-1908*

The sprinkler committee's report contains no technical information, nor does the discussion which follows. What is of interest in the above, however, is the debate over the committee rules which follows the committee report.

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