

# Wellfleet Fire Department



35 Lawrence Road, Wellfleet, MA 02667

Daniel Silverman  
Fire Chief

Phone: (508) 349-3754  
Fax: (508) 349-0318

## Residential Sprinkler Systems

### SPRINKLER SYSTEMS IN INDUSTRY

Schools, office buildings, factories, and other commercial buildings have benefited from fire protection sprinkler systems for over a century. To prevent investments in buildings and machinery, the textile mills in New England began using sprinkler systems over 100 years ago following a series of devastating fires which claimed many lives and destroyed entire businesses.

### SPRINKLERS IN HOMES

But what about our homes? Although we protect our businesses from fire, what actions do we take to protect our families, our homes, and our possessions from fire? Millions of Americans have installed smoke alarms in their homes in the past few years, but a smoke alarm can only alert the occupants to a fire in the house ... it cannot contain or extinguish a fire. Residential sprinkler systems can!

### SPRINKLERS - THE SOLUTION

Fires in residences have taken a high toll of life and property. In 2004 there were:

- 410,500 residential fires
- 3,225 civilian fire deaths
- 14,175 civilian fire injuries
- \$6 billion in property damage

*Data Source: Fire Loss in the U.S. During 2004, NFPA. August 2005.*

Studies by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's United States Fire Administration indicate that the installation of residential fire sprinkler systems could have saved thousands of lives; prevented a large portion of those injuries; and eliminated hundreds of millions of dollars in property losses.

## **WHAT ARE HOME FIRE SPRINKLER SYSTEMS?**

Using quick response sprinklers and approved piping, homes can be built or even retrofitted to include low-cost automatic sprinkler systems connected to the domestic water supply.

Sprinkler systems offer advantages to the homebuilder:

- A low-cost reliable safety option that would attract many buyers.
- Trade-offs between sprinklers and code requirements that can result in lower construction costs, more units per area of land, etc.

For homeowners, the advantages include assurance of a safer environment for their families, protection of their investment and irreplaceable family possessions, and lower insurance rates 5 to 15 percent.

## **ADVANTAGES OF NEWLY DESIGNED HOME SPRINKLER SYSTEMS**

### **Fast Response**

Residential sprinklers, listed by Underwriters Labs, are now available. They are designed to respond to a fire much faster than currently available standard commercial and industrial sprinkler systems. The new home sprinklers react automatically to fires more quickly because of their improved sensitivity.

### **Low Cost**

At the present time, cost of a home sprinkler system is targeted at approximately \$1.00 to \$1.50 per square foot in new construction. It is hoped that the cost will decrease as the use of home fire protection grows. It is also possible to retrofit existing homes with sprinkler systems.

### **Small Size**

For residential systems, the sprinklers will be smaller than traditional, commercial, and industrial sprinklers, and can be aesthetically coordinated with any room decor.

### **Minimal Installation Work**

When homes are under construction or being remodeled, a home sprinkler system will require minimal extra piping and labor.

### **Low Water Requirement**

These systems will require less water than the systems installed in industrial or commercial establishments and can be connected to the domestic water supply.

### **Piping Requirements**

In addition to metallic pipe, the use of plastic pipe has brought down the cost of installation in new construction and the retrofit of existing structures.

## **A GROWING NUMBER OF COMMUNITIES PROMOTE HOME FIRE SPRINKLERS**

The fire loss in this country in residential occupancies is alarming. Manual firefighting methods are not the answer. The way to attack the problem is to limit the fire growth where it occurs in dwellings. We have the technology to do that. There is also a shift within the fire service toward more fire prevention and less suppression emphasis. San Clemente and Corte Madera, California were some of the first communities in the United States to enact a home sprinkler ordinance. Other communities that have initiated or plan to initiate residential sprinkler ordinances include:

- Livermore, California
- Montgomery County, MD
- Long Grove, Illinois
- Chapel Hill, North Carolina
- Germantown, Tennessee
- Scottsdale, Arizona
- Altamonte Springs, Florida

## **TEST YOUR HOME SPRINKLER SYSTEM'S I.Q.**

Here are five statements about home sprinkler systems. Are they true or false?

1. **When one sprinkler goes off, all the sprinklers activate.**  
False! Only the sprinkler over the fire will activate. The sprinkler heads react to temperatures in each room individually. Thus, fire in a bedroom will activate only the sprinkler in that room.
2. **A sprinkler could accidentally go off, causing severe water damage to a home.**  
False! Records, which have been compiled for well over 50 years, prove the likelihood of this occurring is very remote. Furthermore, home sprinklers will be specifically designed and will be rigorously tested to minimize such accidents.
3. **Water damage from a sprinkler system will be more extensive than fire damage.**  
False! The sprinkler system will severely limit a fire's growth. Therefore, damage from a home sprinkler system will be much less severe than the smoke and fire damage if the fire had gone on unabated or even the water damage caused by water from firefighting hose lines.
4. **Home sprinkler systems are expensive.**  
False! Current estimates suggest that when a home is under construction, a home sprinkler system could cost less than 1% of the total building price.
5. **Residential sprinkles are ugly.**  
False! The traditional, commercial-type sprinklers as well as sprinklers for home use are now being designed to fit in with most any decor.

## **SPRINKLERS ARE A GOOD INVESTMENT FOR HOMEBUILDER'S**

Through the use of construction trade-offs, homebuilders and developers can achieve reduced construction costs if residential sprinkler systems are installed. Home sprinkler systems offer both safety and financial advantages to homebuyers, a rare combination.

## **SPRINKLERS ARE A GOOD INVESTMENT FOR THE HOMEBUYER**

- A fire occurs in a residential structure every 79 seconds, according to the U.S. Fire Administration. To the homebuilder, this fact means that a large share of potential customers now have knowledge of the terror and destruction caused by fire.
- Families with children, senior citizens, and handicapped members have special fire protection needs. Home sprinkler systems provide added protection for these people.
- In case of a home fire, firefighters will have less risk of injury or life loss since they will be fighting a fire of less intensity.
- Allocation of community resources can be improved with the adoption of home sprinkler technology.
- Communities will be able to make better utilization of available land and thereby increase their tax base.

## **INSURANCE DISCOUNT**

Insurance from homeowner underwriters will vary depending on type of coverage. The discounts now range between 5-15%, with a projected increase in available discounts.

## **THE MOVE TOWARD HOME SPRINKLER SYSTEMS**

The U.S. Fire Administration's research in home fire sprinkler systems successfully focused on systems that would be low cost, fast acting and reliable. As a result, residential fire sprinklers have gained increased acceptance.

In November 1980, the National Fire Protection Association adopted the NFPA 13D Residential Sprinkler installation standard. The standard is based on technical data from the comprehensive full-scale fire tests, which were sponsored by the U.S. Fire Administration.

## **RESIDENTIAL SPRINKLER PROGRAM**

Dedicated to reducing this Nation's staggering loss of life and property caused by fire, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's U.S. Fire Administration has joined with private industry and the fire service to advance the development of residential sprinklers. Since 1976, the Fire Administration has promoted research studies, development and testing, and demonstrations of residential sprinkler systems.

You can contact your plumber or search the web to locate a contractor for more information about installing a residential sprinkler system.

# The Arguments Against Sprinklers

**MYTH: "Sprinklers are unsightly."**

**BUT IN FACT:** All residential sprinklers come in colors to match ceiling and wall colors and can be recessed or partially recessed.

**MYTH: "The sprinklers may go off accidentally."**

**BUT IN FACT:** Loss records of Factory Mutual Research show that the probability of a sprinkler discharging accidentally due to a manufacturing defect is only 1 in 16 million sprinklers per year in service.

**MYTH: "Sprinklers heads will leak."**

**BUT IN FACT:** Sprinkler systems are under the same pressure as the plumbing system but are tested at 2-3 times higher pressure during installation.

**MYTH: "If one sprinkler head goes off, they all go off. Then, you've really got a mess!"**

**BUT IN FACT:** Sprinkler heads are designed to react to temperatures in each room individually. Normally, only the sprinkler over the fire will activate. Data show that in residential scenarios, usually one sprinkler will control a developing fire; in commercial buildings, as few as three sprinklers will do the job.

**MYTH: "They cause water damage!"**

**BUT IN FACT:** Test conducted by a Los Angeles Fire Department and the US Fire Administration showed that damage caused by water in a sprinklered fire is substantially less than damage caused by fire department hose streams in an identical unsprinklered fire and far less than damage caused by a fire which escapes early detection and suppression.

**MYTH: "Sprinklers are just too expensive to install."**

**BUT IN FACT:** With the development of quick-response sprinkler systems which can be supplied by a home's domestic water supply, a 2,000 square-foot home under construction can be protected today by a system costing as little as \$1,500 to \$2,000 and an older home of comparable size can be retrofitted for about 50 percent. *The cost is 1-2% of the home cost - about as much as to upgrade the carpeting.* more. importantly, there are numerous cost saving benefits of sprinkler systems savings in construction code options and insurance discounts which will offset the cost of installation.

**MYTH: "Residential sprinklers don't save lives."**

**BUT IN FACT:** The evidence on this point is overwhelming. There has not been a single residential fire fatality in a residence with a sprinkler system in either Napa, California or Cobb County, Georgia since the inception of those programs. There has not been a single fire fatality in Prince George's County, Maryland in a building with a sprinkler system. Scottsdale, Arizona credits sprinkler systems with saving up to 52 lives since the ordinance passed in 1985.

*All information courtesy of the United States Fire Administration*