



NFPA report finds higher estimated reliability of fire sprinklers and reaffirms their life-saving impact, especially in homes

September 9, 2005 - The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) today released an updated report with new evidence on the tremendous value of automatic fire sprinkler systems. The report finds sprinklers to be even more reliable than previously estimated in reducing U.S. fire deaths.

But the “U.S. Experience with Sprinklers and Other Fire Extinguishing Equipment” report also confirms that the century-old technology remains underused, especially in the place where the risk of fire death is greatest, the American home.

The report states that when sprinklers are installed, the chances of dying in a fire are reduced by one-half to three-fourths, compared to fires where sprinklers are not present. Sprinklers are now estimated to operate in 93 percent of fires large enough to activate them. And for the first time, it is possible to document that nearly all sprinkler failures involve errors of human judgment, including 65 percent that occurred because the systems had been shut off prior to the fire.

Sprinklers appear to be present in most health care facilities, high-rise hotels and high-rise offices buildings and, to a lesser extent, in department stores and manufacturing facilities.

But most fires still occur in properties without sprinklers, says the report, and the systems remain especially rare in homes. NFPA estimates sprinklers are present in less than 1 percent of the reported fires that occur in one- and two-family dwellings and in less than 8 percent of reported fires in apartments. Where sprinklers are present in homes, their impact on life safety is as large as it has been in other properties where sprinklers have been long-established.

With most of the small number of home sprinkler installations still occurring as a result of ordinances and other mandates rather than owner preference, NFPA has taken a lead role in raising awareness of residential sprinkler availability among homeowners.

The home sprinkler installation tide may be beginning to turn. An historic floor action by NFPA’s membership in June established provisions requiring sprinklers in new one- and two-family dwellings in the 2006 editions of NFPA 101®, Life Safety Code®, NFPA 5000®, Building Construction and Safety Code® and NFPA 1, Uniform Fire Code™.