

FAQ: Sprinklers

What are automatic fire sprinklers?

Automatic fire sprinklers are devices that are installed in the ceilings or on the walls near the ceilings that are essentially nozzles that will spray water on a fire - automatically.

What sets a sprinkler off?

Sprinklers are activated by heat, generally 135°F or higher. The only way there is going to be this much heat in a room is when there is a fire.

How quickly will a sprinkler activate?

Within minutes, possibly seconds, after a fire breaks out a sprinkler will activate, much faster than any fire department can get on the scene. With many fire departments, once you add up the time for the call to 911, processing the call, dispatching the fire fighters, driving to the fire, and advancing a hose line into the building about 10 minutes will pass by. All this time, the fire continues to grow, and grow and grow...

How many sprinklers are set off by a fire?

A vast majority of the time only one or two sprinkler heads activate. It is not like in the movies where you see all of them go off. Each one operates independently of the other ones and opens only if more water is needed to control the fire.

Will a sprinkler go off all by itself if there is no fire?

No. In residence halls, campus fire marshals say that the most common reason for sprinkler heads going off when there isn't a fire are Frisbees and footballs. Sprinklers are pretty rugged, but even a direct hit with a football can be more than it will stand.

Are sprinklers only in residence halls, hotels, and places like that?

No, sprinklers can be everywhere--off-campus apartments, houses, restaurants, nightclubs, bars, and movie theaters. Look for them when you are out and especially in places where you are living or staying.

Are sprinklers used in houses?

Residential sprinkler systems are designed specifically for one- and two-family homes.

Do sprinklers cause a lot of water damage?

Typically you hear about the water damage that is caused by a sprinkler. What you don't hear about is the damage that was avoided by *not* having a fire, or the lives that may have been lost. Wet contents can be dried out. Burned ones cannot be saved. Lives cannot be replaced. Burn injuries are forever. Water damage from a sprinkler system will be much less severe than the damage caused by water from firefighting hose-lines or smoke and fire damage if the fire goes unabated. Quick response sprinklers release 8 to 24 gallons of water per minute compared to 50 to 125 gallons per minute released by a firehose.

Source: USFA Sprinkler Myths and Fact Sheet

The building I live in is made of concrete and won't burn. Why do I need an automatic fire sprinkler?

The building you are in may be noncombustible, but can you say that for the contents? Your chairs, books, bedding, clothing, curtains, towels--that's what burns, that's what gives off the toxic smoke, that's what will kill you if it catches fire--not the building.

Are sprinklers there to save buildings and not save lives?

No. Think about it...if the fire is put out quickly that means that it is not creating smoke that will kill people. There are no two ways about it, sprinklers save lives every single day.

Are sprinklers "green"?

You had better believe it! Water consumption is a LOT less (24 gallons per minute for a sprinkler versus 150 gallons per minute for a fire hose). Putting out a fire in less than a minute means a lot less debris is created to go into landfills versus a fire that destroys a building. Fires put toxic gasses like cyanide, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, hydrogen chloride, and a bunch of carcinogens into the atmosphere. Sprinklers stop this from happening by putting out fires quickly. Sprinklers make for a more sustainable community.