

Home Fire Sprinklers Help Save Lives

The facts are startling: Fire killed more than 4,000 people in the United States in 2003, including 111 firefighters. Considering that 80 percent of all deadly fires occur in homes, many of these individuals could have been saved by a residential fire sprinkler system.

While smoke alarms do a good job of alerting people to fires in their homes, the addition of automatic fire sprinklers increases the chance of surviving a fire from 50 to 97 percent, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

Automatic fire sprinklers work quickly to get a fire under control and prevent the spread of deadly smoke and gases, such as carbon monoxide. One activated sprinkler head can extinguish a residential fire in less than a minute, says the NFPA.

Recognizing the importance of home fire sprinklers, over 200 municipalities across the USA now require sprinklers in the construction of all new single-family homes.

Scottsdale, Arizona, which mandated fire sprinkler systems for new single-family homes 15 years ago, has proof that fire sprinklers save lives. Since the law was enacted, there hasn't been a single fire-related death in Scottsdale in a single-family home equipped with a sprinkler system.

Anyone constructing a new home can add an automatic sprinkler system for less than one percent of the total home's cost, according to the Residential Fire Safety Institute. Installing a sprinkler system to an existing home is more

costly, but some insurance companies offer discounts on homeowner policies for doing so.

The best piping material for residential fire sprinkler systems is the same reliable copper tubing that has been used in plumbing systems for more than 70 years. Plus, only copper water supply pipe comes with a 50-year manufacturer's warranty for residential applications.

Andrew Kireta Jr., national program manager of Building Construction for the Copper Development Association, stresses a major advantage of copper fire sprinkler systems: "Copper isn't vulnerable to open flame and will not emit toxic fumes as plastic tubing can do when exposed to fire. All-copper systems will withstand heat up to 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, and copper has a proven record of reliability in commercial and industrial fire safety."

"Copper is also flexible and lightweight, so it's less intrusive than steel pipe systems, which are ugly to look at, difficult to work with and can require considerable structural and interior changes during installation," Kireta says. "And when fires do happen, copper systems deliver clean water, even if the system has never been flushed — unlike the rusty, sometimes black water from corroded steel pipe systems that can ruin interiors and furnishings." In addition, copper tubing takes paint finishes extremely well, so if there are any exposed pipes, they can be camouflaged to match a homeowner's décor.

Automatic fire sprinklers have been used successfully to protect commercial buildings in this country for over a century. The evidence shows that homeowners would be equally wise to install fire sprinklers to save lives on the home front as well.

To find out more about the benefits of copper piping, visit the CDA Web site at www.copper.org and click on "Tube, Pipe and Fittings" under the heading "Applications." **HP**