

Automatic sprinkler system maintenance



Automatic sprinkler systems are designed to provide the first line of defense against fires, so it's important they are properly maintained on a regular basis.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) study, sprinklers were effective at controlling 96 percent of fires in which they operated. Along with the quick response to a fire, sprinklers will stop or control a fire with much less water: about 1/20th of the amount from a fire hose.

Having a qualified contractor inspect, test and maintain the system annually is key to ensuring an automatic sprinkler system remains in good working order.

It's also important to follow these guidelines:

- Keep sprinkler control valves in the open position by locking valve handles with a chain to prevent accidental closure.
- Maintain 18-inch clearance from the sprinkler heads and stock on shelves or equipment.
- Maintain a 36-inch clearance in front of the riser.
- Keep sprinkler risers properly heated during winter months.
- Correct all deficiencies noted on inspection reports.

In addition to having your system tested annually by a qualified sprinkler contractor, call the contractor if you notice anything out of the ordinary.

Most failures of automatic sprinkler systems are a result of system impairment.

According to a study by the NFPA, in three of every five incidents in which sprinklers failed to operate, the system had been shut off.

Impairments occur in three ways:

- **Preplanned:** systems are turned off for routine maintenance, repair or other planned activity.
- **Emergency:** protection is impaired due to sprinkler leakage, interrupted water supply or other failure.
- **Unknown:** protection is turned off mistakenly, or on purpose without authorization of building management. This may include systems that are not properly restored after repair.

To lessen the chance of failure due to impairment:

- Assign an employee or small team of employees to be aware of all impairments.
- Train the employee or team taking appropriate precautionary measures before, during, and after all impairments.

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