

Residential Fires - “It will never happen to me.”

By Phil Awker – Design Director

It was a chilly October morning as we drove down to the house. Firefighters were still there, but it was mop-up time as the devastation was already done. My in-laws were standing there being consoled by the Fire Chief, still grieving at the loss. Their home, and all the heirlooms contained within, was a charred memory of what was.

“I never, in my wildest dreams, thought this would happen to me” stated my father-in-law, ironically, a retired firefighter. Half frozen tears crawled down everyone’s cheeks, as irreplaceable items were attempted salvage from the scene. The worst violation extracted was the remnants of my mother-in-law’s wedding dress from 47 years ago. All plans for holiday gatherings are now in limbo when you are displaced from your home, your castle. It will take a long time, if ever, for my in-laws to mentally and emotionally recover from this tragedy.

Even though this fire loss was from arson, it still could have been prevented or minimized with a home fire sprinkler system. If you think it will never happen to you, think again. With the holiday season upon us, there will be electrical fires, candle fires and other holiday-related incidents throughout the area. Please, don’t let your house be the lead story on the ten o’clock news some evening – it’s not worth it.

Smoke detectors do not put out fires – fire sprinkler systems do. I installed a sprinkler system in my last house and in my present home, and I sleep better at night knowing it’s there to protect me. The cost for one of these systems works out to approximately 25 cents a day. A lousy quarter! Most people lose that much down in their couch! The carpeting in your home costs more than that, but it won’t save your house – or life. Also, figure on almost a year of relocation inconvenience by the time the insurance company settles and your home can be re-built. Do you have a year of your life to waste? I don’t.

For a period of 5 years, Minnesota State Fire Marshal statistics (*Fire in Minnesota - 1999*) indicate that there were almost 20,000 residential structure fires. This represents approximately 64% of all structure fires over the same time span, resulting in almost 300 deaths. One in every 525 households experienced a fire loss during that time, many of them a total loss! Is that acceptable to you? Does the phrase “It will never happen to me” ring a little hollow now? Don’t let it happen to you or your loved ones.

One myth about fire sprinklers that should be clarified is only the sprinkler(s) in the fire area actuate, **NOT** all of the sprinklers on the system. Please get fact before the fiction.

Look for more information on residential fires and home fire sprinkler systems. It can be obtained by contacting our office (<http://www.ffcdi.com/>). Other resources are:

- Minnesota Residential Sprinkler Task Force – www.fmam.org/Res_Spri.htm
- Minnesota State Fire Marshal’s Office – www.dps.state.mn.us/fmarshal
- Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition – www.homefiresprinkler.org
- National Fire Protection Association – www.nfpa.org