

# PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST ACCIDENTAL WATER DAMAGE CAUSED BY AUTOMATIC SPRINKLER SYSTEMS

## *Be prepared.*

### There are a number of things you can do to protect your property against water damage caused by accidental activation of an automatic sprinkler system.

- Make sure the system has supervisory alarm monitoring by a central station alarm company, for detection of water flow and valve movements.
- Make certain important keys are readily accessible, especially keys to locked control rooms or keys for unlocking several valves at once.
- Keep stock on pallets or skids at least 4" above the floor, to prevent immediate damage due to water. In buildings like roll paper warehouses where skids are impractical, there's another option: Subdivide floor area with grated troughs to limit potential damage. How big should these subdivisions be? That's largely a function of potential dollar losses. One rule of thumb: for products of moderate value with average salvage potential, an area of 10,000 square feet is reasonable.
- Keep on hand a supply of rolled plastic to cover stock. It's also a good idea to have available sump pumps, squeegees, mops and pails for water removal.
- Regularly inspect floor drains to be sure they are unclogged and ready for use.
- Consider installing water detection monitors in areas with critical equipment. They're not expensive and can detect even a small amount of water on floors before serious damage occurs.
- Also consider installing wall scuppers for water removal if there are no floor drains or floor-level doors in the area.
- Arrange for a sprinkler contractor to perform annual inspection and preventive maintenance, including exercising control valves.
- Prominently label each valve with its function and the part of the building it covers. This is important. Where valves are unlabelled, valuable time may be wasted in an emergency in trying to find the right valve by trial and error. In addition, closing valves at random is a dangerous practice. A vital water supply (such as feedwater to a boiler or another part of the sprinkler system) may be cut off, which can result in property damage or business interruption.
- Your facility should have a written procedure for dealing with water damage and should include this in employee and supervisor training sessions. The training should be repeated on an annual basis.
- You should also label major domestic water supply valves with signs indicating the portion of piping the valve controls and the direction for closing. If the valve must never be closed, the sign should say so.

#### *What to do if the sprinkler system activates*

- 1) Notify the fire department, even if there is no sign of fire.
- 2) Wait for the fire department to verify either that there is no fire or the fire is under control, then...
- 3) Shut down the water supply control valve and open the main drain valves.
- 4) Use "red tags" (or another control method) to make sure any valves you have closed are later reset to their proper position.



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