



## Home Fire Sprinklers Media Guide for Firefighters

As someone who speaks with the news media about residential fire in your community, you play a major role in communicating important fire safety and prevention information to the public. This guide provides key information to aid you in making the most of these teachable moments.

Fires in the home pose one of the biggest threats to the people of your community. Over 350,000 home fires occur every year in this country and more than 2,500 people a year die in home fires. Home fire sprinklers are a proven way to protect lives and property against fires at home.

Installing both smoke alarms and a fire sprinkler system reduces the risk of death in a home fire by 82%, compared to having neither. More than one-third of all home fire deaths result from fires in homes with no smoke alarms, while almost one-quarter result from fires in homes in which smoke alarms are present but do not operate. While smoke alarms are critical in alerting residents to a home fire, they cannot extinguish a fire. Home fire sprinkler systems can!

In the same way the fire service has made it common practice to speak to the benefits of having smoke alarms in the home immediately after a fire, we need to do the same with home fire sprinkler messaging while the “smoke is still in the air.” The following key points may be used to emphasize the importance of home fire sprinklers when speaking to the news media.

### KEY POINTS

#### **Safer Fire Service:**

The risk for firefighters decreases when home fire sprinklers are present because sprinklers reduce the intensity of the fire by dousing the flame earlier.

#### **Fast Response:**

Home fire sprinklers can contain and may even extinguish a fire in less time than it would take the fire department to arrive on scene. Modern home sprinklers are designed to respond to fire faster than commercial or industrial sprinkler systems.

#### **Reliable:**

Only the sprinkler closest to the fire will activate, spraying water directly on the fire. Ninety percent of fires are contained by the operation of just one sprinkler. Fire sprinklers are also as reliable as home plumbing systems.

#### **Investment Protection:**

Sprinklers can prevent devastating home damage by extinguishing flames quickly. Sprinklers can limit losses caused by smoke and fire by using less water than firefighting hose lines to suppress a fire. For example, a 15-year study in Scottsdale, Arizona, revealed the average fire loss for a sprinklered residential fire was \$2,166 versus \$45,019 for an unsprinklered home.

#### **Aesthetically Pleasing:**

Home fire sprinklers are smaller and less conspicuous than commercial or industrial types. Many colors are available and some can be installed flush with the ceiling.

#### **Simple Installation:**

Installing a home sprinkler system while a home is under construction or being remodeled requires minimal extra piping and labor and greatly increases the safety of residents.

#### **Low Water Requirement:**

Home fire sprinklers use far less water than fire hoses. Fire hoses, on average, use eight-and-a-half times more water than sprinklers do to contain a fire.

#### **Low Cost:**

Nationally, on average, a sprinkler costs about \$1.35 per square foot in new construction. This cost is about the same as upgraded cabinets or carpet, but fire sprinklers can save life and property.

#### **Lower Insurance:**

Installing a sprinkler system has the potential to lower insurance rates by 5-15% by meeting code requirements.

### **SEEKING OPPORTUNITIES TO EDUCATE**

As a fire service professional, it is your duty to seek opportunities to educate the public on matters of fire and life safety. These opportunities often present themselves in different ways. Sadly, tragedy is often the precursor to “lessons learned” type messaging. For decades the fire service has been very good at pointing out that fire related fatalities could have been prevented if a smoke alarm had been present.

We need to take the next step in the progression of promoting home fire safety. **Now, the message must be “lives may have been saved if home fire sprinklers were present.”** We should now challenge ourselves to make this new message, in combination with the important smoke alarm message, our new mantra after every home fire.

On the positive side, you should seek opportunities to point out successes. While it is common to hear about lives being saved by smoke alarms, the same cannot be said about home fire sprinklers. Every successful fire protection system save should be promoted to increase public awareness of the importance of having these life saving devices on our homes. Other benefits should be promoted as well, such as firefighter safety, property protection, financial savings and environmental protection.

### **SAMPLE SOUND BITES**

Here are a few sample “sound bites” you can use during a media interview.

#### **Do say...**

Home with sprinklers:

- “The fire sprinklers bought the family precious time to escape unharmed.”
- “The quick response of the fire sprinklers kept the fire small, allowing the family to escape safely and minimized the risk to our firefighters.”

Home without fire sprinklers (with possible injury or death):

- “This tragedy could have been prevented had the home been properly equipped with working smoke alarms and residential fire sprinklers.”
- “The devastating damage caused by this fire could have been minimized had a fire sprinkler system been present.”

#### **Don't say...**

- “The fire sprinkler system caused significant water damage.”