

Home Fire Sprinkler Systems Shut Down in Family Homes

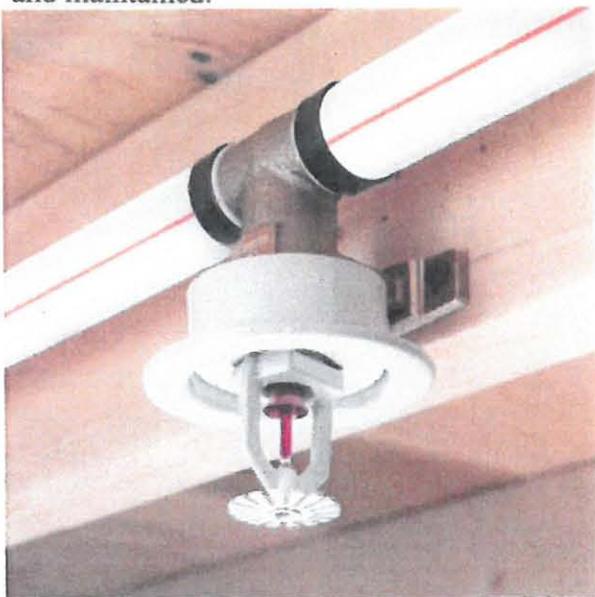
Recent inspections have found some residential Fire Sprinkler Systems serving single family dwellings shut off and inoperative at the red (fire), above ground double check valves, typically found in the front lawn area.



These valves are serviced each year by the Valley Center Municipal Water District and are sometimes covered with decorative covers and wrapped with insulation or weather protection materials.



When the red valves (any one or both) are shut off, there is no water going to your home Fire Sprinkler System. In the event of a fire in your home, the Fire Sprinkler System will not operate. Please immediately confirm that your system is turned on. In homes equipped with Fire Sprinkler Systems, fire code requires they be turned on and maintained.



Home Fire Sprinkler Systems are on-duty all the time and have proven to be one of the most effective devices for saving life and property. The statistics of Fire Sprinkler System effectiveness is extraordinary. Whereas fire sprinklers are your home's silent firefighter and mostly maintenance free, they do require some periodic inspections and maintenance. The following is a guide to assist you with inspecting your sprinkler system. **The good news is, you can do all of this yourself!**

Every month:

Visually check the sprinkler system monthly. This check is to make certain that nothing obstructs the sprinklers which would interfere with their water spray pattern. Walk around your home and:

- Be sure nothing is hanging from sprinkler heads.
- Be sure sprinkler heads have not been painted, including overspray. *(fire sprinkler heads are factory painted with special paint. New sprinkler heads can be ordered from the factory. Painting the fire sprinkler heads with household paint may cause them not to activate in the event of a fire).*
- Be sure there are no obstructions within 18 inches in any direction of the sprinkler head.

Two times a year:

When you change your clocks and when you change your smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector batteries, give your Fire Sprinkler System a quick check as well.

- Be sure that the Fire Sprinkler System pressure gauge is working (the pressure gauge is located in the same location as your domestic water system pipe - where it enters the house). Generally, the pressure should read between 40 and 75 PSI. If pressure is lower, contact a licensed fire sprinkler installer. If the system is higher, conduct a flush test (see below) and see if the pressure drops to normal range.
Note: before you do any test on the Fire Sprinkler System, be sure the system is not wired to your in-home fire/security alarm system. If it is, put the fire alarm in "test mode."
- Open the "inspector's" test valve which is located right where it comes into the house by the regular water source. Some systems have a remote inspector's test valve at the remote end of the sprinkler system. In either case, let the water flow for about a minute. Be on guard as two things will happen: water will come out in force (you might get wet and it may slightly damage landscaping); and secondly, within zero to 90 seconds a bell will ring. The bell will automatically turn itself off when you are done flushing the system.
- In your garage, next to where the Fire Sprinkler System goes into the house or garage, there should be a red box with spare sprinkler heads. Check to be sure that there are at least two sprinkler heads and a sprinkler wrench.

A couple of other notes:

If this is something you are not interested in doing, there are good licensed contractors in the San Diego County area. If you want to modify your sprinkler system, make certain the work is done by a licensed Sprinkler Contractor. A Fire Sprinkler System is a life safety item, engineered specifically for your house size and type. Modifications could render your system useless. When in doubt, call the Fire Marshal for assistance or advice.

In 2001, Omega Sprinklers issued a recall of its sprinkler heads. Although the deadline has passed to have the sprinklers replaced for free under the recall, owners of Omega Sprinklers are encouraged to have their sprinkler heads checked and/or replaced.

The following is intended to educate new homeowners who have purchased a home with an existing Fire Sprinkler System and those who have built, or are building, a home that will have a new Fire Sprinkler System installed.

What is a 13D system?

If your new house has a Fire Sprinkler System Installed, it is likely a 13D type system. 13D is the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) standard for the installation of Fire Sprinkler Systems in one and two family dwellings, as well as mobile homes. The standard was adopted by the NFPA in 1975 with periodic reviews and updates to allow for new technological breakthroughs.

To make Fire Sprinkler Systems economically practical for dwellings, NFPA 13D permits omission of sprinklers from certain building areas where NFPA 13 (the standard for commercial occupancies) would require sprinklers. NFPA 13D also permits two-sprinkler design areas so as to accommodate limited domestic water supplies. This means that the water supply only needs to be able to handle two sprinklers flowing water simultaneously, among the total number of sprinklers in the building.

How do sprinklers operate?

Fire sprinklers are individually heat-activated and connected to a network of piping with water under pressure. When the heat of a fire raises the sprinkler to its operating temperature, usually between 165-175°F, a fusible link or glass bulb will activate only that sprinkler over the fire; thereby only releasing water directly over the source of heat.

Why are sprinklers so effective?

The key to keeping a fire from reaching potentially dangerous and life-threatening proportions is early detection. Fire sprinklers operate automatically over the fire origin (even if you are not home) releasing water directly over the source of heat while simultaneously sounding an alarm. Fire sprinklers keep fires small. In most cases, fires are controlled with one or two sprinklers.

Do sprinklers go off accidentally?

It is possible for a sprinkler to discharge accidentally but it rarely happens. In fact, if a sprinkler is not subjected to freezing, overheating, or mechanical damage, loss records show that only 1 in 16,000,000 sprinklers per year will open accidentally.

What about sprinkler aesthetics?

Sprinklers are no longer the "ugly things hanging from the ceiling." Due to advances in sprinkler technology, sprinklers look better than ever (if you can see them at all). Sprinklers can be concealed in ceilings, out of sight until needed to extinguish a fire. They are available in a wide range of sizes and colors to blend into the background of almost any room. Many realtors are boasting sprinkler systems as a desirable feature (which it is!) when selling homes.

What about water damage?

Water damage due to sprinkler activation is often grossly exaggerated due to comparisons made to small fire losses thanks to the sprinklers. Actually, the water discharged by the Fire Department is typically ten to hundreds of times greater than that discharged from the sprinklers. During a fire, only the sprinkler(s) closest to the fire are activated, limiting the total amount of water needed to suppress a fire.

What are the benefits?

Aside from the obvious property and lifesaving benefits, many insurance companies offer discounts to homeowners that have homes with Fire Sprinkler Systems installed.

Should you have any questions, please call the Valley Center Fire Protection District at [760-751-7600](tel:760-751-7600) and ask for a home inspection.

We will assist you.

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Battalion Chief / Fire Marshal

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