

Houston Fire Deaths Show Need for Complete Sprinkler Protection

The fire in a 6-story medical office building that claimed three lives in Houston, Texas, on March 28, 2007, demonstrates the need for complete automatic sprinkler protection throughout buildings. News reports indicate that the building, constructed 22 years ago, contained a fire sprinkler system in its atrium lobby area, but not in the fourth floor medical offices in which the fire took place. Without sprinklers available to prevent the growth of the fire, heat and smoke spread throughout the top three floors of the building, preventing the escape of building occupants. Survivors reported conditions that prevented them from using hallways and exit stairs, and had to be rescued from the exterior by fire department ladders.

In 2005 the city of Houston passed ordinances that require sprinkler systems throughout all mid-rise and high-rise buildings, but building owners have until 2009 to install those sprinklers.

According to John Viniello, President of the National Fire Sprinkler Association, “The Houston fire deaths are a tragic reminder of why buildings need to be protected throughout with automatic fire sprinkler systems. Even though the lobby atrium was provided with sprinklers, those sprinklers couldn’t be expected to control a fire located elsewhere in the building. Uncontrolled fires produce huge quantities of lethal fire products.”