

My owners installed me years ago, right above their stovetop oven, with a magnificent view of our neighbor's bountiful garden. Each spring, I try not to let the scents of blooming roses and fresh tomatoes distract me from my duty. I am trusted to stand alert at all hours of the day, sniffing the air for smoke and tensely waiting for a flame to lick at my steel exterior. I welcome the responsibility; I am proud to protect this household and those that live in it. My job as a fire sprinkler is not taken lightly.

My heritage is a long and respectful one, spanning over two centuries. Any fire sprinkler's ancestry can be traced back to 1806 in England. This was where the concept of the automatic sprinkler system came about as introduced by an inventor, John Carey. It was a heat-operated system that allowed water to fall on the fire through perforated pipes. However, compared to my advanced technologies, it was insufficient. Carey's system drenched the room with water, often damaging property inside it that was not on fire to begin with. This often led to costs higher than the fire damage itself. Seeing room for improvement, Major Stewart Harrison of London developed the automatic sprinkler head in 1864. Then, in 1874, Henry Parmelee of Newhaven, Connecticut extended my family tree even further by introducing the first modern sprinkler. He essentially pioneered the automatic sprinkler system industry with his closed sprinkler head invention. Parmelee gave this new system the ability to change which heads expelled water. Water was only released when a predetermined temperature was reached, indicated by an innovative heat sensor, causing the valve to open. My own great grandpa was a Parmelee sprinkler head; he was uninstalled and replaced after preventing four house fires. He is my role model; I hope to some day prove my loyalty to my owners in the ways that he did.

The evolution of my kind continued in 1881 with Frederick Grinnell's invention. He revolutionized the industry by discovering a method to increase heat sensitivity of the sprinkler head. He then added John Taylor's Variable Pressure Alarm Valve. This valve allowed for a continuous, loud sounding gong to signal that a fire had started. This was far superior to the past alarms that only sounded once. Taylor's contribution can even be found in me today! I have been tempted to test it out, but I don't want to scare my owners.

Finally, fire sprinklers became influential enough that the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) was formed in 1896. They published the first code for automatic sprinkler installation and outlined the standards as to how it should be done. In 1913, the NFPA received optimistic news; only five deaths had been recorded in sprinkler-protected properties since the invention's implementation 38 years prior. I hope the numbers are still this low today. I cannot imagine being the sprinkler system that failed to fulfill his or her responsibility.

Just when I thought our line of automatic sprinkler systems could not be any more sophisticated, the Central Sprinkler Company introduced the Extra Large Orifice (ELO) sprinkler in 1992. It has the astounding ability to cover large areas of property, which is especially useful in sizeable buildings. Progress continued in 1996, when the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition was formed to encourage the public to install these life-saving devices. A further step was recently taken in 2009, when the NFPA started the Fire Sprinkler Initiative: Bringing Safety Home. This initiative pushed for the requirement of fire sprinkler systems in new family homes. Our neighbors lack a sprinkler system, and sometimes I watch over their house too, even though I know I can do nothing if I spot a fire. Hopefully the new regulations and publicity of our effectiveness will change their mind before it's too late.

I cannot comprehend why these neighbors have not purchased one yet. If there is a fire, these systems are highly cost beneficial. On average, homes without sprinklers installed pay \$42,853 more to repair the damage than houses with sprinklers. They also increase the retail value of a home. Moreover, the systems react much quicker than the local fire department ever could, putting out 90% of fires before the firefighters even arrive. This is only the beginning of the benefits; the reasons to install today are countless.

I had a horrible dream the other night. Even though I am required to stay alert at all hours, I couldn't help but drift off. In my nightmare, I was human. It was late at night and I was in a deep sleep, comforted by a thick blanket and a feather-soft pillow. Suddenly, I heard harrowing screams that shook me awake. I rushed to open to my door, only to find the doorknob scorching hot. Smoke was billowing out from under the gap below and into my lungs, causing me to cough violently. I heard

the screams again; they were from my family members, trapped by the fire in their adjacent bedrooms. I felt panicked and helpless. Would my family die? Would our house turn into ashes? I was on the verge of tears when I was jolted out of the nightmare and back into the quiet, dark kitchen of my home. I breathed in the fresh air breezing through the open window and relaxed. If I could speak, I would tell this horror story to everyone I could. I would remind them that a fire sprinkler system is more than just a piece of steel and wires; it is a life saving device. I would warn them of all the flammable materials in their household, patiently waiting for enough heat to combust. And I would ask them one simple question. Which is more important, a little time and money spent to install this system, or you and your family's life? It is a small sacrifice.

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