

## A Dorm's Most Important Accessory

In a few moments another school year will begin. Families will come pouring through the doors of Jefferson Dormitory carrying, dragging and lugging all the “stuff” the new freshman will need to survive their very first year of college. Beds will be made, clothes stuffed into drawers, posters hung on the wall, dorm keys activated and deposits put on microwaves and refrigerators. The families participate in these activities to make the new freshman feel comfortable and safe in their new environment. Will anyone look up and see me on the ceiling? Has anyone asked if their new home is equipped with me and my automatic fire sprinkler family? We are a dormitory's most important accessory.

The origins of my family date back to 1806 in England where John Carey developed the first heat-operated system that distributed water through perforated pipes to extinguish fire. (History) However, it took fifty eight years before another Englishman, Major Stewart Harrison of London's Engineer Volunteers, enhanced the system further by inventing the first Automatic Sprinkler Head. (History) At the same time in America, Henry S. Parmelee, concerned for the damage fire could cause his piano factory, developed the concept further. (Bellis) The Parmelee sprinkler head was advanced, providing a way to control which heads discharged water. These sprinklers used a heat-sensing device that only opened the valve when a predetermined temperature was reached. Today, my family and I use a fusible link, which breaks at 160 degrees Fahrenheit, opening the valve and releasing water. (New) There were many others that worked hard to continue the progress of our development, until finally in 1896 our family system was standardized to form the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). (History)

My family comes from the category of commercial systems under the type called “wet pipe system”. We are responsible for the bigger buildings such as warehouses, office buildings, stores, high rise apartments and of course, college dormitories. While we do differ slightly from our cousins, the residential systems, the objective is the same for everyone; control a fire at its beginning stage therefore avoiding major damage to the building and most importantly the loss of life. (American)

Being an automatic fire sprinkler is sometimes like being “a fly on the wall” or on the ceiling, if you will. The things some of these kids do to us make me want to melt my fusible link. First of all, after you’ve finally noticed us, do not hang a hanger from us like we are a “ceiling” closet. It is not an ingenious idea and can actually cause damage to us if you accidentally strike the fusible link element that causes our sprinkler head to open. (Living) Also, we are not clothes racks. Hanging clothing directly from us can reduce the heat getting to the sprinkler and delay its opening in the event of a fire. (Living)

Another pet peeve of mine is when I hear someone say “A smoke detector is enough protection.” Are you serious? Think about your dorm room strewn with clothes, clothing, bedding, books and papers. What do all those items have in common? The words “food for fire” comes to my mind. While smoke detectors provide an excellent method of detecting fire early and warning everyone to get out the fire still needs to be put out before it spreads. Fire has a nasty way of roaring through a building quickly, destroying everything and everyone in its path. In a building without sprinklers, a fire can grow from a single lit match to flashover in a matter of minutes. (American) Can everyone in the dorm get out in a few minutes? Will everyone hear the smoke detector with their I pods blaring in their ears? However, with my family on guard as soon as we feel the heat our fusible link melts and we will burst open,

allowing water to flow in a spray pattern designed to flow a specific amount of water per square foot based on the type of hazard that it is protecting. We will distribute water efficiently and effectively, stopping that fire in its tracks. (Living)

My family and I are very proud of the fact that we are being taken seriously. On September 27, 2006, the U.S. House of Representatives passed House Resolution 295, which recognizes September as national Campus Fire Safety Month. (National) Accidents do happen, but at least steps are being taken across the nation to make students more aware of how they can protect themselves in the event of a fire.

One of my friends once asked me “what would you say to these kids if you could talk and they actually listened”. The first thing I’d tell them is that an automatic fire sprinkler system is one of the most effective methods of controlling and/or suppressing fire. (American) According to the NFPA, we sprinklers reduce your chance of dying by one half to two thirds in any kind of property where they are used. (Living) Our system is made up of a network of pipes in the walls and ceilings that have us sprinkler heads providing protection to hallways, rooms, stairways and other areas of the dorm. In most of the systems our pipes are always filled with water under pressure and the system is ready to do its job of sending water to us sprinkler heads so we can do our job of putting out a fire quickly! (Living) It is our job to react in a matter of seconds while it can take a fire department up to ten minutes, or more until they are set up to put water onto the fire.

In-coming freshman to Jefferson Dormitory I just want you to know that you are safe under our watch. We work great under fire (if you’ll excuse the pun). Enjoy your first year of college. Just keep us in mind and remember to treat us with respect and we’ll return the favor by saving your life in a fire.

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