Sprinklers

Document number (AP003/PS003)

Next Review Due 31/03/2029

1. Purpose

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority (HIWFRA) is committed to ensuring that Hampshire and the Isle of Wight have an efficient and effective fire and rescue service which makes life safer for everyone.

This is HIWFRA's Position Statement for Sprinklers and forms part of the HIWFRA's Protection Policy.

2. Authority's Position

Sprinklers

The correct installation and use of fire sprinklers provides an effective means of securing life, property and firefighter safety. When sprinklers are used within a building, some conventional design requirements can be waived. Without these conventional measures, significant costs can be saved in the design of a building.

We will promote and campaign for the use of sprinklers in higher risk premises to enhance and improve public and firefighter safety.

Sprinklers in Schools

The prevention of fires in educational establishments remains a priority for us, because of their standing as a public and community asset and their importance for the educational wellbeing of children. The loss of course-work, the implications in terms of wider economic and social costs, property protection and environmental damage means fires in schools have far reaching consequences. Schools also tend to be a target for arsonists.

We will recommend that new schools must have sprinklers fitted and that when being refurbished, must consider the retrofit of an appropriate sprinkler system.

Sprinklers in Residential Care Premises

HIWFRA has serious concerns about fire safety in residential care homes, where residents are more vulnerable to fire due to age, mobility issues, or cognitive impairments. We believe that sprinklers are critical to protecting vulnerable residents and staff. For many years, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and fire and rescue services (FRS) across England have been calling for the greater mandating of sprinklers in care homes.

The installation of sprinklers in residential care homes would reduce the likelihood of the fire spreading beyond the room of origin, which buys time for evacuation and firefighting and can reduce the need for unnecessary movement of vulnerable residents.

We welcome the introduction of mandatory installation of sprinkler systems for all newly built residential care homes from March 2025 but will use our legislative powers where appropriate to ensure those undergoing extension or major and significant refurbishment, consider sprinklers to protect those vulnerable from fire.

Sprinklers in High Rise Buildings

The risks to firefighters and residents in high-rise buildings are substantial. Fires in this type of building can present additional risks and considerations for the occupants and firefighters. The design and construction of these buildings delay intervention by the fire service, meaning fires can escalate rapidly.

HIWFRA welcomes the 2019 reduction of the height threshold for the installation of sprinklers in new residential buildings to 11 metres. Despite lowering of the threshold we recommend the retrofit of an appropriate sprinkler system in all residential buildings above 11 meters in height.

Sprinklers in Commercial Buildings

The risks to firefighters in large commercial buildings are substantial, due to the size and potential for rapid collapse of the building. This is particularly relevant when considering modern methods of construction. Sprinklers significantly reduce risks associated with firefighting operations and the impacts of fire.

The presence of more large commercial buildings with sprinklers will aid growth in the economy, as it will reduce business losses from fire, as fewer businesses will financially fail or be forced to relocate. The environmental impact of fires in commercial premises can be significant. Using sprinklers to control fires will reduce this impact on the environment and surrounding infrastructure.

Currently, newly built commercial premises with an area over 20,000 square meters are required to fit sprinklers, however;

We will promote the installation of sprinklers in all commercial buildings based on the ability to improve firefighter safety and reduce impacts on the environment and surrounding infrastructure.

Sprinklers in Timber Framed Constructed Buildings

Unlike traditionally built property, a timber framed building is at the greatest risk of fire during the construction phase, due to the amount of exposed and unprotected combustible elements. Fires in timber framed buildings have resulted in very rapid fire development, leading to early structural collapse, and complete loss. The severity of radiant heat generated has caused fire spread to neighbouring buildings up to 30 metres away.

We will recommend that timber framed buildings are installed with sprinklers and installation should be completed as soon as practicable, to protect the building during the highest risk construction phase.

Sprinklers in Domestic Premises

Fire safety measures such as smoke detectors, may sometimes not be sufficient to protect the most vulnerable when there is a fire within their home, due to their inability to evacuate themselves. This vulnerability can be due to factors such as lifestyle characteristics and those with less mobility. The ageing population and changes in social care policy, mean that more vulnerable people are remaining in their own homes.

We support sprinklers in homes designed for the most vulnerable. We recommend a review to seek the integration of sprinkler systems in all new builds, similar to the approach taken by Welsh government.

HIWFRS teams will continue to report sprinkler saves to the recognised national professional sprinkler association, to highlight the importance of sprinklers within people, property and environmental protection.

Sprinkler Saves UK: Promoting the ability of sprinklers

Hospitals and Other Higher-Risk Health Care Premises

Hospitals are a vital community asset, yet provision to help protect them through sprinklers is not mandatory in England. The Department of Health and Social Care in England's 'Health and Technical Memorandum (HTM) 05-02: Fire risk management in healthcare premises' recommends the installation of sprinkler systems in hospitals. This document encourages sprinklers but does not mandate them, a recommendation that hospitals are choosing to ignore.

Fire in these buildings would result in significant loss to society and its ability to look after patients in our communities. A key protection measure that is demonstrated to mitigate these risks and impacts, and prevent multiple fatalities or injuries, is a sprinkler system.

We recommend that all new hospital buildings and other higher-risk healthcare premises have sprinklers fitted regardless of height.

NFCC Sprinklers Position Statement: Automatic Water Suppression Systems Policy Statement - NFCC