



OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

February 2016

A Powerful Example for Requiring Residential Sprinklers:

Over the past 10 years the battle for residential sprinklers has really picked up, with some victories for both sides. From the local municipal officials discussing the benefit in one housing development, to the national debate that now requires sprinklers in the model codes, we need to always be aware of the efforts to derail this success.

Each day I read articles of people that died in fires, while other stories appear where people were saved by a sprinkler. While the news stories about sprinkler saves increases annually our work is far from finished. Just as common as the efforts to promote sprinklers are those that are trying to change the requirements for sprinklers, extend the adoption cycles or prohibit sprinklers altogether. In my opinion, the answer is clear. All new residential buildings, homes to high-rise should be protected by sprinklers. Here's one of the best examples that I've seen -

A few weeks ago my community experienced a fire in the early morning hours at an apartment complex where a smoldering object ignited some combustible materials, outside on the covered porch.





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This fire scenario is not unique as fires frequently occur in this area from careless cooking, or carelessly discarded smoking materials. However, this fire was different because the porch was protected by an NFPA 13-R sprinkler system. The fire spread from a decorative plant to some cardboard and vinyl siding, spreading rapidly up the wall to the ceiling starting to get out of control. Then, a single sprinkler activated and extinguished the fire. What happened next is the best part of the story.

The sprinkler system flow switch activated the fire alarm control unit (FACU) notifying the supervising station, who then notified the fire department. The fire department was dispatched for a fire alarm signal, and the local police department was also notified to assist. The police officer was the first to arrive and indicated that it appeared that there was a fire, but it is now extinguished. The FD arrived and confirmed there was a fire, but it is now extinguished. The FD then controlled the flow of water from the sprinkler system.

The tenants in the apartment were asleep. They woke hearing the sprinkler alarm sounding outside and smelled smoke, so they got up to investigate. But, the fire was already extinguished.



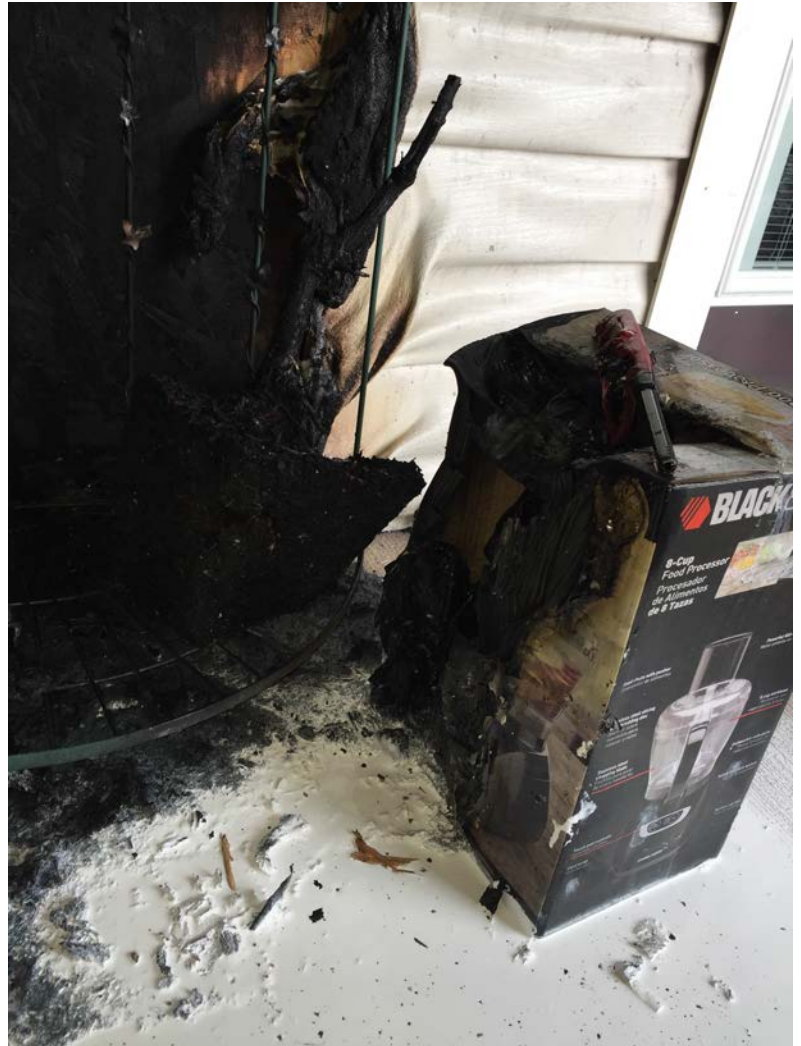
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Everyone who was involved in this fire was alerted or notified to the fire after it was extinguished. There was minimal damage. There were no injuries. No one was displaced. This fire did not make the news. Even a kitchen appliance that was still in the cardboard box was only partially consumed before the sprinkler activated.

About two years ago a fire of similar origin occurred nearby and destroyed 24 apartments, causing more than \$1.5 million in damage and placed building occupants and firefighters at great risk. The building had three floors, but one was considered a story below grade - thus a 2-story building in accordance with the building code. At the time of construction, two story buildings did not require sprinklers - only those taller were deemed to be more dangerous. Fortunately, that exception no longer exists and ANY new apartment, or new multi-family building requires sprinklers.



Each of these fires involved students in some fashion. Some were graduate students and many lived in these buildings with their families. The CCFS supports efforts at the local, state and national level to require the use of residential sprinklers in all new housing. If you need additional resources please contact me.



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Tim Knisely is on the Board of Directors for The Center and the Senior Fire Inspector for the Centre Region Code Administration in State College, PA.

In this position he manages the Existing Structures Division that administers the fire and property maintenance code in all existing commercial and residential rental properties, and coordinates the life safety education for the community including off-campus and Greek housing.



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Tim has been active with The Center for Campus Fire Safety since its inception and served as treasurer from 2007 to 2010. He is a frequent presenter at Campus Fire Forum, an instructor for the Fire-Wise Campus program and served as project manager for Campus Fire Data.



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