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Codes Review Newsletter March 2021



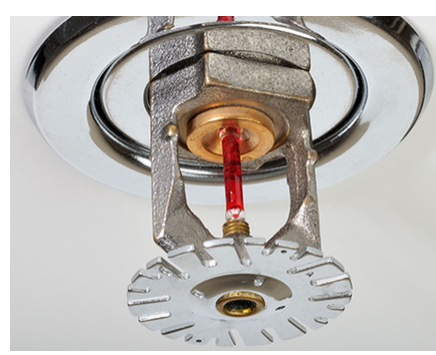
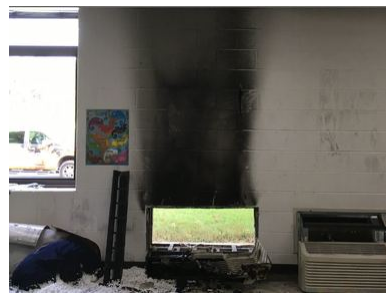
Quick action and building codes keep teachers safe at Mt. Juliet Elementary School

Just after 7 o'clock on a Monday morning, several teachers heard a loud "pop" from a HVAC wall unit in a Mt. Juliet Elementary School classroom. It was soon followed by smoke and flames rising up the wall.

Just as they had been trained to do, the teachers exited the room and pulled the fire alarm as they exited the building. The fire alarm automatically alerted the fire department. The automatically closing classroom door shut behind them as they left. The door latch prevented the high pressure in the room from opening the door – helping to contain the fire. Then a fire sprinkler head in the room activated to control and extinguish the flames.

When the Mt. Juliet Fire Department arrived at 7:18 a.m., they were then able to extinguish what remained of the fire with a fire extinguisher and removed the damaged unit from the school.

Thankfully, due to an alternate school schedule necessitated by COVID-19, there were no students at the school at the time of the fire. But, this incident illustrates just how important building codes and fire safety planning and drills are. All of the safety features acted together to protect the building, its occupants and the first responders.



Codes Corner: Fire Sprinkler Confusion

by: Chris Bainbridge, Director

We are often asked if a building requires a fire sprinkler system. The building and fire codes have various triggers that dictate when one is required. These triggers include

the size, number of stories, building materials and unique occupancy-specific requirements such as egress arrangements in a school or high-risk night club.

Some occupancies always require a fire sprinkler system. One of these are Group R – Residential buildings regulated by the International Building Code (IBC). This does not include one-family and two-family dwellings regulated by the International Residential Code (IRC), however. While the IRC requires a sprinkler system for these dwellings, Tennessee Code Annotated § 68-120-101(a)(8) prohibits the State Fire Marshal from requiring them. State law always supersedes adopted codes.

The IBC has unique situations where a building is classified as Group R – Residential but can be built to the IRC if sprinklered. Since these are not classified as one-family and two-family dwellings, they must have a sprinkler system. It is always best to consult with local or state authorities having jurisdiction prior to construction of buildings such as bed and breakfasts, group homes, large rental homes, etc. This could potentially save thousands of dollars and lost construction hours.



When is an architect or engineer required?

by: Philip Cameron, Plans Examiner Manager

Other than [one-and two-family dwellings](#), [townhouses](#) or farm buildings that are not intended for human occupancy, all buildings

in Tennessee must have plans produced by a registered design professional unless specifically exempted by T.C.A. Section 62-2-102(b). That person can be either an architect or engineer that is registered by the [Tennessee Board of Architectural and Engineer Examiners](#). The Board gives details for the [requirements of building design](#) on their website.

Structures classified as business, factory-industrial, hazardous, mercantile, residential and storage occupancies are exempted when they are less than 5,000 sq. ft. and less than three stories.

Three occupancy types must have plans prepared by registered design professional regardless of the size of the facility. These are:

- *Assembly*: such as churches, restaurants, museums having a capacity of 50 or more persons
- *Educational*: such as schools and day cares
- *Institutional*: such as jails, detention centers, nursing homes, and hospitals

For further information regarding situations where a registered design professional is not required, [click here](#).



Employee Spotlight: Philip Cameron, Plans Examiner Manager

Philip Cameron is the Plans Examiner Manager of the Codes Enforcement Section of the State Fire Marshal's office. He supports a staff of examiners that work to ensure building designs meet code requirements.

Since joining the section in 2016, he has worked to maintain a positive and efficient plan review process. He is proud to participate in regulation that has a positive impact on communities by ensuring the buildings we occupy are safe, healthy and better for our environment.

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