
BBS MEMO

Ohio Board of Building Standards

March 19, 1999

6606 Tussing Road, P.O. Box 4009, Reynoldsburg, Ohio 43068-9009

OMEGA SPRINKLER RECALL

The purpose of this memo is to raise the level of awareness and to address concerns that building department personnel may have in relation to the much publicized recall of the Omega brand fire sprinkler heads manufactured by Central Sprinkler Company.

BACKGROUND: In November of 1998, the Central Sprinkler Company in conjunction with the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) issued a nationwide recall of *all* Omega brand sprinklers manufactured between 1983 and 1998 and installed in buildings. The CPSC believes that Omega fire sprinklers are defective and could fail in a fire, exposing the public to bodily injury or death.

As part of the settlement agreement, Central has established a replacement program wherein owners of Omega sprinklers can have each Omega sprinkler replaced with a free Quick Response Glass bulb sprinkler. Labor costs associated with installing the new sprinklers will also be reimbursed under the conditions of the agreement. Central has set up a toll-free hotline (1-800-896-5685) and a web site (www.omegarecall.com) to help owners identify Omega sprinklers and to disseminate information about the settlement and the replacement program.

THE REMEDY: Central Sprinkler Company has been proactively trying to identify buildings containing these sprinklers. However, to ensure that all Omega sprinklers installed within the State of Ohio have been identified and replaced, the Board of Building Standard's staff along with the State Fire Marshal's Office staff have developed the following courses of action:

1. The State Fire Marshal has issued a "Fire Safety Alert" to all Fire departments in Ohio. This document warned fire officials of the Omega sprinkler problems and requested that, during their regular inspections of the facilities, the departments assist in identifying the Omega sprinklers within their respective jurisdictions. The document also requested that the fire officials provide information about the Omega sprinklers and the Central replacement program to all contractors and owners within their jurisdiction.
2. In addition to this BBS Memo which is sent to all certified building departments throughout Ohio, the Board of Building Standards will issue a letter to all Ohio Certified Automatic Sprinkler System Designers requesting that they look through their design files to identify the facilities in which Omega sprinklers were installed and report any findings to the building owner, local fire official, and State Fire Marshal. These two documents will be available through the BBS FaxBack service.
3. The State Fire Marshal will issue a letter to all Ohio licensed sprinkler contractors requesting that they look through their shop drawing files to identify the facilities in which Omega sprinklers were installed and report any findings to the building owner, local fire official, and the State Fire Marshal. Additionally, all sprinkler contractors will be requested to inspect for and document the absence or presence of Omega sprinklers while conducting all annual maintenance inspections. All corrective actions must be properly inspected and documented.

4. An article will be submitted for publication in the Fire Marshal's Newsletter, outlining an enforcement strategy for local fire officials to address the recall. Pertinent code references for citations will be noted.
5. A link to the recall information will be provided on the Fire Marshal's Web Page.

HOW WILL BUILDING DEPARTMENTS BE AFFECTED?

Obviously, the Omega sprinkler recall raises the following question: What is the status of the approval of an existing building which is required to be fully sprinklered but is now determined to have malfunctioning sprinklers? The building approval has not been violated. However, it is an issue analogous to a water supply valve in the line of the sprinkler system being closed...it is a maintenance issue. Building officials are usually involved during the plan review and inspection of new sprinkler systems and during the plan review and inspection of additions and modifications to existing sprinkler systems. The legal responsibility for inspection in the years after installation falls to the fire official. The fire official will inspect the facility on a regular basis to ensure that the owner is maintaining the system in good working order. Typically, replacement of a sprinkler head, "like for like", would fall under the category of minor repair or maintenance of a sprinkler system. In accordance with OBBC section 3401.2.2, "minor repairs to structures may be made without application or notice to the building official..."

BBS staff in cooperation with the State Fire Marshal's Office has developed the following guidelines for building owners who find Omega sprinklers in their facilities:

1. If the owner takes advantage of the Central Sprinkler Company replacement program:

The work would be considered a minor repair, "like for like" replacement. An inspection by the building official would not be necessary. However, as a courtesy and for record keeping purposes, we recommend that the owner send a brief letter describing the extent of the work to the building official.

2. If the owner *does not* choose to take advantage of the Central Sprinkler Company replacement program:

- a. If utilizing replacement sprinklers having the same orifice size as the Omega sprinklers, then the work would be considered a minor repair, "like for like" replacement. No inspection would be necessary. However, again, we would recommend that the owner send a brief letter describing the extent of the work to the building official.

- b. If not utilizing replacement sprinklers having the same orifice size as the Omega sprinklers, then the work would not be considered minor repair, "like for like" replacement. This would be considered an alteration to the existing system and the owner would need to submit application for a hydraulic calculation review and plan review from the building department. A review and inspection would be necessary to ensure that the new sprinklers will discharge the required density, based upon the hydraulic characteristics of the existing system.

Your building department may want to post these guidelines in a location visible to owners/plan submitters.