

Lessons Learned



Title: Lack of Water Flow Alarm Turns Paper into Pulp

Loss Amount: \$200,000

What Happened: The manager of a commercial printing supply and distribution warehouse knew something was amiss when he drove into the parking lot early one Monday morning. The fire alarm was ringing, but he saw no signs of smoke or flames. Upon entering the building, he was greeted with an indoor shower and a pool of water.

An investigation revealed that sometime during the weekend, a sprinkler head malfunctioned, spraying water over paper stock, much of which was stored on the floor. The entire building was equipped with a sprinkler system and an Underwriters Laboratories (UL) listed central station burglar alarm.

The sprinkler system was equipped with an audible bell, the sound the manager heard when he arrived, but it was not monitored by an outside company or the fire department. The failure of a single sprinkler head resulted in a \$200,000 loss.

Lessons Learned:

- Protecting your building with a sprinkler system or burglar alarm is only partially effective. If no one hears the alarm, the system doesn't do much good.
- For complete security, arrange to have your system monitored by a water flow alarm connected to a central station or direct report. A central station alarm reports to an alarm company, while a direct alarm reports directly to a fire department.
- Don't rely on a sprinkler system to extinguish a fire. It merely contains the blaze until firefighters arrive. Therefore, it is essential that a central station or direct report water flow alarm be in place.
- This business was protected by a UL approved central station burglar alarm, so an extension to monitor the sprinkler water flow would have been an inexpensive addition to their overall monitoring costs.
- In this case, elevating the paper inventory off the floor and onto pallets or racks would have reduced this loss.
- Equip facilities with drains, scuppers, or slanted floors, which allow for water to run off. Increased humidity from pooling water (trapped inside a building) can damage paper stock not touched by the spray from the open sprinkler head.
- Where possible, equip a warehouse facility with drains, scuppers, or slanted floors.

For Further Assistance in Preventing this Type of Loss:

- Click on the Customer Library link in the Community Portal to obtain these resources:
 - Monitored Sprinkler System Saves Restaurant
 - Supervision, Testing of Sprinkler System Control Valves
 - Fire Prevention-General Warehousing and Storage
- Contact your Fireman's Fund Loss Control Consultant;
- Call the Fireman's Fund Loss Control Help Desk toll-free at 1-888-527-6872; or
- E-mail us at [http://www.firemansfund.com/about ffic/about us/contact us.html](http://www.firemansfund.com/about_ffic/about_us/contact_us.html)



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