

RISK MANAGEMENT BULLETIN

ALERT: *SPRINKLER HEAD FAILURES*

As a result of an extensive water damage loss recently handled by our office, Risk Management Division has learned of a possible failure pattern involving **3 mm quick response fire sprinkler heads**. The National Fire Sprinkler Association and Underwriters Laboratories believe that the failure of the thin-walled, glass-bulb, quick-response heads is not uncommon and so far seems to be independent of any particular manufacturer. Data continues to be collected and the issue studied.

It is suspected that when the quick-response heads are removed from their packaging, they are commonly tossed into the same container by field installers before installation. This exposes the glass-bulb of one head to impact by the metal parts of other heads. Impact may stress the glass bulb, leading to pre-operation (this is not unlike a chip in an automobile windshield, causing stress to that glass, eventually leading to the failure of the windshield).

The trend is for listing agencies to require bulb protectors as part of the fire sprinkler head, with the listing being voided if the protector is removed prior to head installation.

While fire sprinkler contractors in Maine are becoming aware of this potential problem and have begun emphasizing the careful handling of fire sprinkler heads in the field prior to installation, we feel action on your part is also warranted. Please share this advisory with your construction project architects, owner representatives and clerks of the works. Insist on careful handling.

Risk Management would like to recommend that your organization evaluate all locations being protected by existing 3mm quick response fire sprinkler heads. If you find that a 3mm quick response head is protecting an area critical to your organization's operations, it may be desirable to replace the head as a precaution. This is suggested only for those areas where a discharge could either shut down your entire organizations operations, would likely result in a substantial bodily injury of a person, or cause damage to items that are unique and cannot be replaced.

Risk Management would also like to recommend that your organization examine all 3mm quick acting sprinkler heads for evidence of any damage or rough treatment. If any such heads are found, replacement may be in order to prevent an accidental or unintended discharge. Given that damaged heads can be set off for little or no reason, be sure that any hands on evaluation of 3mm quick acting heads is done with due regard for personal safety and for protection of the facility.

Call our office if you have any questions at all, or if we can be of assistance.

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Initial Issuance Date: November 2002