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Historic Oregon Courthouse Now a Safer Place for Business

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A quick history lesson about commercial fire sprinklers.

(OREGON CITY) - The Clackamas County Courthouse in Oregon City is now fully protected by a newly installed automatic sprinkler system and a complete monitored fire alarm system.

Safety experts say this is a significant improvement in the fire safety for the visitors and employees occupying this building.

Although fire sprinkler systems were invented in the 1870's, the court house was built without them and as such this was a complex retro-fit of sprinklers in a historic building.

The first automatic sprinkler system incidentally, was patented by Philip W. Pratt of Abington, MA, in 1872.

Henry S. Parmalee of New Haven, Connecticut is considered the inventor of the first practical automatic sprinkler head. Parmalee improved upon the Pratt patent and created a better sprinkler system. In 1874, he installed his fire sprinkler system into the piano factory that he owned.

Until the 1940s, sprinklers were installed almost exclusively for the protection of commercial buildings, whose owners were generally able to recoup their expenses with savings in insurance costs. Over the years, fire sprinklers have become mandatory safety equipment, and are required by building codes to be placed in hospitals, schools, hotels and other public buildings.

Clackamas Fire District #1 began pursuing this upgrade in July of 2003 and now this historic building is better protected from fire damage.

Not just for commercial buildings anymore

A national study in 1998 through 2001 showed that sprinklers reduced fire-damage costs by 95 percent. 7/02/07 Oregonian, by Rick Bella;

In 1986, the city of Scottsdale, Ariz., began requiring all new buildings, including single-family homes, to be equipped with sprinkler systems. In the first 15 years, there were 49 fires in sprinkler-equipped homes without a single death, while 13 people died in homes without sprinklers. 7/02/07 Oregonian, by Rick Bella;

For Single family homes, the cost of a home sprinkler system is roughly equivalent to wall-to-wall carpeting. If installed during initial construction or during a down-to-the-bones remodel, sprinkler systems cost about $3,000 to $4,000, depending on the size of the home. 7/02/07 Oregonian, by Rick Bella;

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