

Starting the Clock on When a Sprinkler is “In Service” – Part 3

In the last two issues of TechNotes (278 and 279), we’ve had a running dialog on the concept of starting the clock for determining when sample testing needs to be performed on fire sprinklers. Each time, the publication of the newsletter sparked debate and discussion, which is a good thing in the industry. It is rare when we devote three editions of this newsletter to the same subject, but a significant point was raised in the most recent discussion that needs to be conveyed to the NFSA membership, so we are bringing it up here in the hopes of finally putting this subject to rest.

The significant point that was raised during the most recent discussion is the last sentence in an annex note (A.5.3.1) in NFPA 25, which reads, “Where documentation of the installation date is not available, the start date for the in-service interval should be based upon the sprinkler manufacture date.” This language was added in the 2008 edition of NFPA 25 and has been carried forward into the more recent editions.

This certainly clarifies that the committee’s intent is to allow the use of the installation date as the method for starting the clock, but to fall back to the manufacturer’s date stamped on the sprinkler if the installation date is not available.

From a practical perspective, the installation date can be very hard to find. Paperwork isn’t always available to the inspecting/testing contractor and building owners frequently don’t know when certain components were installed in their buildings. Complicating the matter is that there can be multiple different installation dates for sprinklers in the same building. Since new sprinklers need to be installed every time a sprinkler is removed, there can be many different sprinklers installed in the same system with different installation dates. If the sprinklers that are replaced come from the spare sprinkler cabinet, the sprinklers in the system will have different installation dates, but the same manufacturing date. Therefore, based on when renovations, tenant improvements, or simple replacements occur, and where the sprinklers came from that were used in the work, a building owner wanting to use the installation date rather than the date of manufacture of the sprinkler as the basis for sample testing of old sprinklers would need to keep some pretty detailed records.

Keeping detailed records of the type of sprinkler and installation date can be a service that the sprinkler contractor offers to a client in order to keep their long-term inspection and testing business as well as their repair and service business. By keeping track of the installation date, they can show how they save their customer a little if there is a significant difference between the installation date and the date of manufacture of the sprinklers.

Building owners that do not keep this level of detail in their records will have to use the date of manufacture of the sprinklers for determining when it is time to do their sample testing of their sprinklers.

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