



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

The Truth, The Whole Truth, Nothing But the Truth!

When you go to court and get ready to testify, there is a little phrase that you are required to repeat to make sure you understand what you are about to do. It goes like this: "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

You must answer yes or you won't be allowed to testify. Most people take that oath pretty seriously. I know I do. Those that don't are often referred to as people who perjure themselves. In other words, they deliberately say something that they not to be the whole truth but they hope to get away with the lie and not be held accountable for what they just said.

This came to light again when reviewing another series of tirades of local newspapers by building developers about the concept of residential sprinklers. What is it about these people that they simply cannot tell the truth? I think I have heard the major myths about fire sprinklers about 30 years ago. They were lies then. They are still lies.

Nobody in their right mind believes any of them anymore, but they are continuously perpetuated in arguments by developers as if they were just coined yesterday. Isn't that a little suspicious? What I find very somewhat amazing is that our major politicians have not awakened to this phenomenon. They keep believing this distorted testimony and using it as a cop out to not act on statewide or local legislation that will result in the most effective life saving device that we have today, the residential sprinkler, from being installed in single family dwellings.

That doesn't mean that there aren't some courageous politicians out there because there are. It doesn't mean that there aren't some intelligent developers that tell the truth, because there are. Generally speaking both of these types of people seem to be located in areas where the fire service has an excellent working relationship with their influence leaders and they have sat down and talked about the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth from day one. In other words, these politicians and developers have seen beyond the myth making and oral fabrication that often goes into the debates about sprinklers and realize that they do work.

About one of the best states in the union where it actually has occurred is in the great State of Maryland. Starting with Fire Chief Jim Estep's efforts, and continued with Bill Bernard as the State Fire Marshal for that state, they have continued to press for the use of this technology despite minor setbacks. Recently I received a note from a friend in Maryland telling me about a fire that had occurred. In this case the fire sprinkler saved a \$500,000.00 home. ¹They occupied it again that night. Is that a myth? I don't think so. Then why didn't it get front page coverage like it deserved? I don't have address

¹ Photo Courtesy of Dennis Gentzel



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of this fire, but I bet the entire neighborhood is really glad that this house did not burn to the ground. If I know Maryland, I bet the neighbors have sprinklers in their homes too and are really glad they do right now. It coulda been them. By the way – how about the old cliché that fires only happen in old houses? Does this house look over the hill to you?

One of the things about the state of Maryland is that they are probably one of the best at in the country in keeping the issue of residential sprinklers in front of their politicians. In my own home state of California, Fire Marshals Kate Dargan and Tonya Hoover have scored some major successes in doing the same thing.

Another thing the various Sprinkler Coalitions and Advocacy groups are doing is publicizing these successes. That's very good. When I received this series of slides from a fire department that experienced a sprinkler activation I was hoping it would get national recognition. This fire should be able to refute almost anybody's perception that sprinklers are bad for housing. But, the media seems bent on ignoring the truth.





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You will see by the two photographs that have been attached to this article that this was not a fire that could be ignored. It occurred in a dwelling in which the sprinklers not only contained the fire but allowed its continued occupancy after the fire. How many kitchen fires have you seen that started on the stove and ended up taking the house?

Isn't that what built in fire protection is supposed to do? Why doesn't this fire get as much publicity as the myth making and rumor mongering that goes on before people actually have an opportunity to see how sprinklers function? It would almost seem as if we need to ask developers and builders to swear an oath with one hand on the New Testament and holding the International Fire Code in the other. Don't stand too close because lighting might strike very close by.

When we find someone perjuring themselves in a courtroom, generally the judge will give out some form of punishment. However, when people perjure themselves about the truth of residential fire sprinklers, there is nobody to hold them accountable. Once they are proven wrong, many of them just turn their palms upward and utter an expression of confusion or resignation. They give the Alfred E. Neuman look from Mad Magazine, grimace and move on.



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I believe that as the country continues to embrace residential sprinkler technology in areas where there are enlightened influence leaders in the community, America's fire problem is going to start morphing into something really different. There are going to be parts of this country where loss of life to a single family dwelling fire is going to be a rare occasion. There are going to be parts of this country in which loss of life in single family dwellings will continue at a rate that has been consistent in the past. Shame on them.

If you are picking a part of the world that you would like to have your residents in and to have your family sleeping in those homes, which area would you pick; sprinklered or un-sprinklered?