

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

Central Sprinkler Company Announces Voluntary Program to Replace 35 Million O-Ring Sprinklers

July 2001

Dear Authority Having Jurisdiction:

We are writing to share some very important safety information regarding fire sprinklers that may be installed in your area of jurisdiction. Because of the important role you play in helping to promote fire safety, we wanted you to be among the first to know about this initiative.

Central Sprinkler Company, an affiliate of Tyco Fire Products LP, of Lansdale, PA (Central), and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) have announced a voluntary replacement program for O-ring sprinklers. The company will provide parts and labor to replace approximately 35 million fire sprinklers with O-ring seals.

The program involves approximately 33 million “wet” sprinklers with O-ring seals manufactured by Central and approximately 2 million “dry” sprinkler heads with O-rings manufactured by Central. Also included are about 101,000 “On-Off” sprinklers used in “wet” systems and sold by Gem Sprinkler Co. and another 66,000 “dry” sprinklers manufactured by Star Sprinkler Inc. Enclosed please find a notice packet and a list of questions and answers, which provide more detail about this program.

Why are the sprinklers being replaced?

Central initiated this action because it discovered that these O-ring sprinklers can degrade over time. These sprinkler heads can corrode, or minerals, salts and other contaminants in water can affect the rubber O-ring seals. These factors could cause the sprinkler heads not to activate in a fire. Laboratory testing has indicated that the majority of the sprinklers would operate in a fire situation; however, some required higher water pressure to activate than may be available in particular buildings.

Central has received four reports of “wet” O-ring sprinkler heads failing to activate during a fire situation and nine similar reports of “dry” O-ring sprinkler heads. These incidents resulted in two property damage claims against Central.

What fire sprinkler models are involved in this program?

The “wet” sprinkler models with O-rings manufactured by Central that are covered by this program include the following:

CENTRAL “WET” SPRINKLERS (MANUFACTURED FROM 1989-2000)					
GB	GB4-FR	GB-R1	BB2	ELOC	ELO-GB QR
GB-J	GB4-EC	GB-RS	BB3	ESLO	LD
GB-1	GB4-QREC	GB-R	SD1	ELO SW-20	K17-231
GB-ALPHA	GB-20	ROC	SD2	ELO SW-24	Ultra K17
GB4	GB-20 QR	BB1 17/32	SD3	ESLO-20 GB	ELO-16 GB
GB-QR	GB-LO	BB2 17/32	HIP	ELO-231 GB	GB MULTI-LEVEL
GBR-2	LF	BB3 17/32	WS	ELO-GB	GB-QR MULTI-LEVEL
GB-EC	GBR	BB1	ELO-LH	ELO-231 GBQR	ELO-16 GB FR

The “dry” sprinklers with O-rings manufactured by Central that are included in this program include the following models:

CENTRAL “DRY” SPRINKLERS (MANUFACTURED FROM MID-1970s-2001)			
A-1	GB	GB4-EC	ELO-16 GB
H-1	GB-QR	GB4-QREC	ELO-16 GB FR
J	GB4	ELO-231 GB	
K	GB4-FR	ELO-GB QR	

The program also covers approximately 167,000 Gem and Star brand sprinklers with O-rings, including the following models:

GEM “WET” SPRINKLERS (SOLD UNDER GEM NAME FROM 1995-2001)
F927
Note: Replacement sprinklers for Gem “Wet” sprinklers will not have “On-Off” functionality.

STAR “DRY” SPRINKLERS (MANUFACTURED FROM 1996-1998)	
ME-1	SG
SG-QR	Q
Q-QR	

Where are these sprinklers found?

These sprinklers were installed nationwide in a wide variety of buildings, including houses, apartments, hospitals, day care facilities, dormitories, schools, nursing homes, hotels, parking garages, supermarkets, warehouses, and office buildings.

What do I need to know about the replacement?

We will replace each of these O-ring sprinkler heads with a free replacement Belleville seal sprinkler head. Belleville seals use a metallic “spring seal” – rather than a rubber O-ring – to maintain a watertight seal. In order to cover building owners’ costs for replacement labor and minimize disruption to building owners, we will either perform the replacement work ourselves or contract with an authorized sprinkler installer to perform the replacement work.

Due to the number of sprinklers involved, sprinklers will be replaced over time, with priority based on the age of the sprinklers, the population affected (e.g., hospitals and nursing homes submitting claims will be given priority), and whether the sprinklers show signs of corrosion or leakage. Central and the CPSC staff agree that this phased-in program puts in place an orderly process that serves the public interest.

The CPSC staff joins us in urging you to assist in ensuring that this voluntary replacement program succeeds by avoiding actions that may cause unnecessary panic by, or expense to, building owners. We ask that you recognize that the orderly and efficient replacement of sprinklers will be advanced if building owners are allowed to replace their sprinklers over time according to this CPSC-approved program. Central also urges you to refrain from imposing a fire watch requirement for buildings with these O-ring sprinklers or from regarding those buildings as “unsprinklered.” To ensure participation by the maximum number of building owners, we ask that you waive any permitting fees or other fees in connection with this program.

Central is aggressively communicating with other interested parties to make them aware of this program. To that end, Central is encouraging building and home owners to participate and is asking its customers and other sprinkler installation contractors to involve their customers and to direct inquiries to Central for assistance.

What do building owners need to do to properly maintain sprinklers?

Central and the Commission staff emphasize that for sprinkler systems to be effective, they must be regularly inspected, and maintained like a building’s heating, cooling, electrical and elevator systems. In addition, the most recent industry standards state that dry sprinkler heads should be tested, and replaced, if necessary, at least every 10 years. Central believes all fire sprinkler heads should be tested no later than 10 years after installation, and depending on water quality and other factors, more frequent testing may be appropriate. You can assist in this effort by ensuring that building and home owners are aware of the need for routine sprinkler and sprinkler system inspection, testing, and maintenance.

What do I do if I – or my constituents – have questions?

Please read the enclosed notice packet, which provides more detail about this important effort. Also enclosed is a list of questions and answers that provides more detail about this important effort, and will assist you in discussing the program with your constituents. In addition, we encourage you to

visit our special website -- www.SprinklerReplacement.com – or call our special, toll-free **Contractor and Industry Professional Hotline – 1-866-836-3928** (9 a.m. to 7 p.m) EST – for more information. We also invite you to place a link to www.SprinklerReplacement.com on your website so your constituents have ready access to all the information they need about the replacement program. If your constituents have questions, they can call Central's **Customer Service Hotline – 1-866-505-8553** (9 a.m. to 7 p.m.) EST – or visit the website.

Central believes this program is both prudent and the responsible thing to do and enables us to provide more enhanced protection to our sprinkler customers. We believe that this initiative will benefit the entire fire protection community, and help further spread the word about the importance of fire sprinklers in saving lives and protecting property. We urge you to familiarize yourself with this program and encourage your constituents' participation. Your assistance in maintaining a calm atmosphere and allowing the program to proceed in an orderly manner will help the program to succeed.

On behalf of all of us at Central Sprinkler, we thank you for your assistance and your ongoing support.

Sincerely,
Robert J. Brinkman, Jr.
President
Central Sprinkler Company