

# Dollars and sense

*Increased demand, cheaper materials, and trade-ups drive down the cost of home fire sprinklers*



Anne Mazzola of Las Vegas survived a fire thanks to sprinklers in her Las Vegas home. Watch her story at [www.nfpa.org/mazzola](http://www.nfpa.org/mazzola)

One of the most persistent myths about home fire sprinklers relates to cost. Sprinkler ordinances have been adopted by several hundred communities across the United States – and sprinklers are required in all new homes in California, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. However, misinformation regarding the price associated with installation often creates a potential barrier to broader adoption.

In reality, the cost of installing sprinklers in new construction is minimal – and dropping. “The cost to homebuilders, in dollars per sprinklered square foot, averages about \$1.35,” says Lorraine Carli of the National Fire Protection Association. That figure includes all associated costs including design, installation, permits, additional equipment, and water meter fees.

The cost of sprinklers is actually down from \$1.61 per sprinklered square foot in 2008, according to a recent study<sup>1</sup> that looked at installation scenarios in 51 homes across 17 communities in North America. The report considered several factors that can affect cost, including local code requirements, piping material, water supply, fees, home type (custom vs. tract), and foundation type.

While the cost of installing sprinklers can be impacted by local ordinances and amendments to national codes, (ie. adding requirements for sprinklers in garages or attics), the report found significantly lower costs in the two states that require sprinklers. In fact, in some parts of

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***The cost of home fire sprinklers is about what homebuyers might pay for an upgrade in carpeting, a paving stone driveway, or a whirlpool bath.***

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California, the cost is lower than \$1 per square foot.

Sprinkler installation requirements are also proven to have no measurable impact on the pace of housing construction or home prices relative to comparable nearby communities without sprinkler ordinances<sup>2</sup>.

Another reason that sprinklers have become so affordable is the low cost of plastic piping, typically CPVC or PEX. Special glue secures the plastic pipe connections, reducing the problems of sweating copper joints or threading steel pipe. Most home sprinklers operate off the household water main and use plastic piping installed behind walls and ceilings in finished areas.

As a builder, you can also take advantage of the many trade-ups associated with installing sprinklers (i.e. street width reduction, increased hydrant spacing) and reduce your costs even further.

## **Offer your buyers a safer home**

In the event of a fire, sprinklers often extinguish the flames before the local fire department arrives on the scene. According to the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition, the average fire loss in a home with sprinklers is \$2,166 vs. \$45,019 in a home without sprinklers.

Your customers may also qualify for a tax rebate and a discount on the fire portion of their homeowner’s insurance policy.



Florida homebuilder Sam Davis has installed sprinklers in dozens of homes.

Sam Davis, a homebuilder in Florida, believes strongly in the value of sprinklers. Over the years, he’s installed sprinklers in dozens of homes and takes every opportunity to educate his clients about how sprinklers can protect their families from fire.

“Fire sprinklers do save property, but their main function is to save lives,” he says. “Homeowners can spend a fortune on appliances, cabinets and granite countertops but those things do nothing to protect their families against a fire. I hope it never happens, but I’m waiting for the day when I get a call from a homeowner who tells me that their sprinklers activated and saved someone’s life. Home fire sprinklers are well worth the investment.”

Las Vegas homeowner Anne Mazzola agrees. She and her husband were home while a work crew was putting sealant on their living room floor. The sealant product ignited and sparked an intense fire. “I heard an explosion and when I came out of the bedroom, I saw enormous red and orange flames and black smoke. It was surreal, larger than life.”

“Suddenly, the sprinklers in the living room activated and extinguished the flames,” she says. “And then the fire was out. Just like that. No one even had to think. Not only did the sprinklers save our lives, but those sprinklers going off in the zones where they were needed saved our house. Having home fire sprinklers is a no-brainer.”