

Hazard/Definition

Urban Fire (Multiple Units):

Uncontrolled burning in a residence or building from natural, human or technical causes.

Description/Frequency

The threat of fire and explosion exists in every building. This threat can be accidental, from electrical wiring or careless use of fire; or it can be intentional, as in the case of arson or terrorism. Although arson was once confined to major urban areas, it now occurs in communities all over the United States. Fires are most devastating when they occur in large or multiple units where hundreds of people work or live. The largest number of lives lost in an urban structural fire occurred at the Iroquois Theater in Chicago in 1903 where 602 persons died. The "Chicago Fire" of 1871, which killed 230 people, burned 17,540 buildings and caused damages of \$196 million, ranks as one of the worst urban fires in the country's history.

Historical Score: 3

December 11, 1989: Stratford Park West Condominium (24 units) was destroyed by fire. Two (2) people were killed, 8 injured and 40 residents left homeless. The fire started when a resident dumped a fuel accelerant into his fireplace to start a fire. (No sprinkler system)

September 8, 1990: A 16 unit apartment building at 2040 Canyon Boulevard was destroyed by fire, injuring 5 people and leaving over 20 residents homeless. The fire was caused by arson and damages were approximately \$1,000,000. (No sprinkler system)

June 15, 1993: The Northport Apartments (1133 Portland Place) were gutted by fire. The fire claimed half of the 40 units of the city owned housing unit for the elderly and disabled, and left 51 residents homeless. The blaze was sparked by an explosion as a painter sprayed lacquer in an apartment on the north end of the complex. The painter later died from complications caused by the explosion. (No sprinkler system)

Potential Score: 3

As population increases and more multiple dwellings are built to accommodate these increases, the potential for urban fires will rise.

Mitigation Options/Strategies

Regulations to require the installation of automatic sprinkler systems in all multiple dwelling units.

Fire codes established for all public and private buildings and inspections made by local and federal fire officials.

Fire code regulations include mandatory safety measures for multiple dwelling units.

Installation of smoke detectors and fire alarms. These are preventive methods designed to discover fires early before they spread.

Plan alternate escape routes from all levels and hold periodic fire drills. Use metal or rope ladders as fire escapes from upper floors. Teach occupants what to do in various fire conditions such as heavy smoke or blocked exits.

Public education programs provided on fire safety measures and how to access community fire services such as inspections and emergency services.

SCC Communications and US West partnered together for a warning and evacuation system for Boulder County. It is called the Emergency Warning and Evacuation Service (EWES) and is part of the Emergency Preparedness Network (EPN). The existing 9-1-1 database of telephone numbers and addresses is used in combination with detailed maps to help determine the geographic boundaries of an area impacted. The system is capable of calling up to 2,000 numbers in one minute. It is designed to deliver recorded information to endangered people in advance of a disaster or any major event. Messages can be delivered in various languages, as well as to pagers or the Emergency Alert System (EAS). Multiple floodplain areas can be handled during a single event with priority given to the area most impacted.

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Impact on Life and Property:

Heat and smoke present the most immediate danger from an urban fire. Explosions are usually accompanied by flying debris that can cause injury or unconsciousness. In crowded buildings, irrational behavior may present the greatest danger. The spread of fire to other buildings is always a possibility.

All of the buildings mentioned above were not protected by automatic sprinklers. Had an automatic sprinkler system been installed in the buildings, either originally, or at a later date, the outcome may have been entirely different.

A community can be impacted emotionally, as well as economically, when fire destroys property and lives.

Revised 2000