

FIRE PROTECTION MAINTENANCE IS ALWAYS A TOP PRIORITY

BY MICHAEL POPKE



Hooper Corp.

For most business owners, fire protection is a top priority. Like insurance, it's a major but necessary expense, but sprinklers and other fire suppression systems, along with extinguishers and alarms, can fail when they're needed most if they are not kept in good working condition.

Ryan Zebell, service division manager for fire protection at Hooper Corp., a DeForest-based mechanical contractor that helps businesses develop fire protection plans, stresses that regular maintenance by a qualified fire protection professional is critical.

For fire protection, Hooper specializes in sprinkler and other suppression systems and recommends third parties for extinguishers and alarms. With a history dating back to 1913, Hooper is an electric power and mechanical contractor that provides commercial and residential services. It is headquartered in Wisconsin with regional offices in Colorado, Florida, and Ohio. "Not only can regular maintenance identify and correct potential issues before they become significant, it also

ensures that systems remain compliant with local fire codes and regulations," Zebell says.

The number of sprinkler systems required in a commercial building varies by locale and is based on square footage. In some spaces, such as computer server rooms and dry storage areas where water would do significant damage, a sprinkler system is not ideal. Instead, fire suppression systems such as dry chemicals can be used, according to Zebell.

The National Fire Protection Association requires suppression systems to be inspected quarterly, a task Zebell recommends be conducted by a professional, especially for liability reasons. Extinguishers and alarms should be professionally checked on an annual or semiannual basis as well.

Routine service and maintenance can take as little as one hour or up to a week, depending on the number of systems and the complexity of the building. Testing can involve valve, fire pump, and backflow testing, and sprinkler head inspections — always to current local code and all done in accor-

dance with NFPA 25, the baseline standard for inspection, testing, and maintenance of water-based fire protection systems.

Compliance helps maximize system integrity to avoid failure and ensure fast, effective response in a fire emergency. Potential maintenance required could include fire pump, backflow, and valve repairs; sprinkler head repair; leaking pipe repairs; and impairment and deficiency repairs.

Without a fire protection maintenance plan, building owners risk major penalties and fines, loss of financial investment, and even loss of life for building occupants, Zebell notes. He adds that the Madison Fire Department regularly conducts random inspections at local businesses.

"The main thing is to make sure that people are getting these things done" he says. "Hooper would love the opportunity to provide this service, and we encourage people to make sure it's getting done by qualified/certified/licensed technicians. It's a life safety issue, and it's important. It can save lives." ■

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