

The Redwoods Group Insurance Program for JCCs

RISK MANAGEMENT ALERT

TOPIC: Automatic Sprinkler Protection

Jordan is a high school student that was looking forward to playing basketball after school. But when he arrived at the gym, there was already a game in progress. A little upset, he decided to shoot hoops by himself on the next court. He was practicing a layup when a ball rolled onto his court and kicked it out of his way. The ball flew into the air, up to the ceiling, and hit an automatic sprinkler. The sprinkler head broke and spewed water at a rate of 40 gallons per minute, until the system was shut down. The fire alarm started screaming and standing water slowly filled the gym.

This incident happened at one of our customers' facilities in the fall of 2012. Their new gym floor cost around \$100,000. But more importantly, it took more than 60 days to clean and install the new floor. During that time, youth sports were interrupted, programming sites needed to change and members became unhappy. And for two months, that organization couldn't fulfill part of its service to the community while the gymnasium was closed.

The organization had taken precautions against this and placed small cages around the sprinklers in the gym. Unfortunately, those wire cages were built to deflect 4oz – 6oz balls, not 20oz basketballs travelling at high speeds.

Use the following protocols to ensure your automatic sprinklers are protected and still protect you.

What's at Risk?

Most sprinkler systems discharge at a rate of 30-40 gallons per minute. When broken, a sprinkler head will discharge at this rate until the system is shut down.

When this much water covers a wooden floor, such as the gym, racquetball court or other area, it warps the playing surface. So, there are a few steps you can take to prevent the damage from water ruining the floor surface.

Please call us at 800-463-8546 to discuss this or any other risk management safety tip, or visit our web site at www.redwoodsgroup.com to learn more about JCC risk management issues.

Protecting the Sprinkler Head

Adding cages to all automatic sprinkler heads in the gym will protect the sprinkler from impact and prevent flooding. Even upright sprinkler heads are not sufficiently protected by the sprinkler pipe and need cages.

First, install "bolt" on cages on all sprinkler heads in the gymnasiums, racquet ball courts or other multipurpose rooms where they are likely to be damaged.

Second, make sure you know where the sprinkler shut off valve(s) are located in the facility. These valve locations should be prominently marked. In addition, as part of your emergency plan you should note these locations and keep them at the front desk in case of an emergency.

The Cost

Standard wire sprinkler covers provide little protection from oncoming basketballs and footballs. Some cages are reinforced to protect against these flying objects. You can purchase these cages for about \$35 each, with additional bulk rates. One supplier,

[SprinkGuard \(<http://sprinkguard.com>\)](http://sprinkguard.com), provides welded cages that can stand up to even a direct hit from a baseball bat—[watch some of their demos](#).



How to Install the Cages

The cages fit over the sprinkler head and do not require professional installment. A ladder and a screwdriver are the only tools you'll need.

These cages will protect your facility and save a lot of inconvenience for you and your program participants. Preventing damage to the facility and keeping member satisfaction allows you to do what you do best, have a positive impact on your community.