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ANOTHER KIND OF "SCUD" A Loss Prevention Perspective

Those who have seen the Millers Mutual Presentation "Who's looking at your buildings -- What do they see" already know that this "SCUD" is the "Self Closing Unit Door" for individual apartments now required by most codes. This SCUD saves lives by keeping fire and smoke in the unit of origin, as the plaster will be there long after the furniture is incinerated.

According to NFPA: Of the structure fires, 396,000 were residential fires, accounting for 77.5% of all structure fires, and a decrease of 3.7% from a year ago. Of the residential structure fires, 287,000 occurred in on- and two-family dwellings, accounting for 56.2% of all structure fires. Another 94,000 occurred in apartments accounting for 18.4% of all structure fires.

According to code expert Les Harvey, "We made important improvements in apartment building safety once we understood that major losses resulted from tenants running out of burning units and leaving the door open to expose corridors and in open stairwell cases, the whole building".

What is surprising is that many apartment building managers, and for that matter tenants, don't understand the real life saving purpose the SCUD serves. In one recent case, a building manager was planning to remove the SCUDS from all apartments as he "just couldn't understand why the self closers were installed in the first place". Gordon Earhart, CSP, CFPS in his "Code Footprint" places this in perspective with his observation that "without education and training, many code requirements simply don't lend themselves to intuitive thought.

An important part of the Millers Mutual Loss Prevention Survey is just that, education of building managers about SCUD and other important life safety features. According to Risk Manager, Al Rosatti, "When you explain basic life safety concepts, you can actually see the light go on".

The life safety in existing apartment buildings can be greatly improved by the installation of SCUD's as even plaster over wood lath has measurable fire resistance. The sales pitch is easier when you explain that you don't need a \$60.00 hydraulic ram that "knocks tenants down". Since the 1970's, the spring loaded hinge has been a device of choice to provide a soft but effective close.

Another important purpose of the Millers Loss Prevention Survey is to make sure SCUD's are working properly. Recent causes of failure include bent or missing springs, lost tension pins and the very common "hang up" on newly installed carpeting.

As code expert Don Aston pointed out, "to be effective, the SCUD closing device must be installed on a solid core, or fire rated apartment door, as it made no sense to install them on hollow core doors that burn through in 5 minutes."

One Loss Prevention professional puts it this way, "If I could have only one life safety feature in an apartment building, it would be solid core, or fire rated Self Closing Unit Doors.

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