

New Year, New Knowledge: Sprinklers Control Fires Fast

Why Sprinklers Exist

Sprinklers are built to control or slow a fire early, which helps reduce heat and smoke, protect escape routes, and make it safer for everyone to evacuate.



Why a Sprinkler Discharging Is Serious

If a sprinkler head is discharging water, it usually means the space near the ceiling got hot enough from a fire to trigger it. In other words, conditions are dangerous in that area, and the sprinkler is doing its job to control the fire.

What Activates a Sprinkler

- Heat activates sprinklers, not smoke.
- A sprinkler head opens when the area near the ceiling reaches a set temperature (often in the **135°F–165°F** range, depending on the head).
- Only the sprinkler(s) near the fire activate, not the whole building.

How Tenants Help Keep Sprinklers Working

- Keep space below sprinklers clear. A common rule is 18 inches of clearance, so the spray pattern isn't blocked.
- Never hang anything from sprinkler pipes or heads (decorations, signs, plants, cables).
- Never paint, cover, tape, or "adjust" sprinkler heads.
- Report immediately: leaking water, damaged heads, missing ceiling tiles near sprinkler areas, or anything blocking sprinkler coverage.

What To Do If a Sprinkler Goes Off

1. Leave the area and follow your building's emergency instructions.
2. Activate the nearest Pull Station if there's visible fire/smoke (and it's safe to do so).
3. Call 911 and notify building security or management right away.
4. Do not try to shut off valves or stop the water yourself, let building staff/FDNY handle it.

When sprinklers activate, conditions are already dangerous, your best move is to follow building instructions, evacuate safely, and report what you see.

