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The importance of upgrading fire alarm systems - Part 3

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Devices in older buildings tend to be located in places that do not meet current code requirements. Pull stations are typically not mounted at the correct height for the present Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) codes. The audible visual devices are usually mounted too high with inadequate coverage and are not synchronized. Today's systems need to interface the sprinkler system with monitor modules. These devices connect directly to the waterflow and valve tamper switches to provide annunciation of the individual device at the main control panel.

Smoke detector locations are also code-driven, and the number of detectors required is dictated by type and use of the facility. Present day smoke detectors, which use analog technology to sense a fire, contain more features than their predecessors. These programmable devices help prevent false alarms and are also capable of alerting maintenance personnel when smoke detectors need cleaning. The resulting benefit is more efficient maintenance of detectors.

Whichever manufacturer is selected, all audible and visual devices must meet current UL guidelines for proper light and sound output. All buildings over seventy feet and those classified as 'assembly occupancy' are required to have voice systems.

The Importance of System Maintenance and Testing

A fire alarm maintenance and testing program is a critical aspect of the facility's life safety system. It helps ensure proper operation of the fire alarm system, and will isolate and quickly repair any problems within the system. The testing program should be performed quarterly, and it is imperative that the testing company be UL listed and licensed. An experienced testing company will also keep the fire alarm equipment up-to-date by recommending upgrades to the system as they become available.

Life safety systems are designed to protect people and property. Through the automatic detection of any dangerous fire-related incident, a properly designed and functioning fire alarm system will immediately notify the fire department and/or the building management. If necessary, the system will also facilitate a speedy, orderly and safe evacuation of the building. In high-rise buildings, the system will even unlock doors, control stair pressurization and smoke exhaust fans, and provide communication links for fire fighters. Modern day systems offer all of the features that make these actions possible. The challenge is determining how to upgrade a building to meet current codes in a way that controls cost, minimizes disruption, and allows for expansion and continued upgrading over time.

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