THE BYSTANDER EFFECT: CLOSING THE GAPS

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Chris Campion, P.E., SET, CFPS, has worked in fire protection since 1996, with experience spanning inspection, testing, installation, service, design, commissioning, engineering, and code enforcement.

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The authority on fire, electrical, and building safety

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Objectives

OPENING

- Identify the links in the chain of approvals.
- Describe the responsibility of each link in the process.
- Explain the different perspectives each may have.
- Describe documenting and raising awareness of issues.
- List ways to escalate to key stakeholders.

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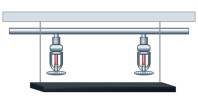
Why are we here?

OPENING

"It was approved."

The engineer checked it. | The reviewer checked it. | The Contractor installed it.



What does that really mean?

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What is the bystander effect?

BYSTANDER EFFECT

A person fails to act because other people are present.

Someone else must have called.

Relying on others can result in a failure of action.

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Why do people wait?

BYSTANDER EFFECT

SOMEONE ELSE	THE EXPERT	THE GROUP
"They will handle it."	"They know more than I do."	"Nobody else is concerned."

If everyone else is content, there must be nothing to worry about.

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Experienced people can still miss it

BYSTANDER EFFECT

- They are not sure what they are seeing.
- They expect another stakeholder to catch it.
- They are reluctant to question an approval.
- They doubt themselves in the situation.

The issue needs to be checked, not questioning someone's competence.

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The same thinking shows up on a job

BYSTANDER EFFECT

IN AN EMERGENCY	ON A PROJECT
Someone called.	Someone checked it.
They know what to do.	It's what's on the plans.
Nobody is reacting.	It already has an approval.

Relying on others can leave gaps in recognizing issues.

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A job passes through many hands

MANY HANDS

1. **Owner** — Use and overall results
2. **Design team** — Criteria and coordination
3. **Sprinkler contractor** — Layout, materials and installation
4. **Reviewers** — Owner, insurer and AHJ
5. **Field team** — Install, inspect and test
6. **Owner and ITM** — Maintain and track changes

Every handoff needs the accurate information.

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Different jobs. Different perspectives.

THE PEOPLE

For fire protection people, fire is the focus.

For others, it may be one more part of the job.

Know who brings the needed knowledge and experience.

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The owner starts with the use

THE PEOPLE

FIRE PROTECTION NEEDS	OTHER OWNER CONCERNS
Actual use and materials	Cost and opening date
Storage height and arrangement	Tenants and operations
Changes planned for the space	Future changes

The room label is a starting point.

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The architect sees the whole building

THE PEOPLE

SPRINKLER COORDINATION

- Ceilings and openings
- Features and obstructions
- Construction and interfaces

OTHER ARCHITECT WORK

- Rooms, exits and accessibility
- Finishes and appearance
- Coordination of the design team

An aesthetic decision can become a sprinkler question.

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MEP covers a lot of systems

THE PEOPLE

MECHANICAL

- Heating and cooling
- Airflow and exhaust

ELECTRICAL

- Power and lighting
- Standby power and controls

PLUMBING

- Water, waste and vent
- Gas and service piping

Where does fire protection work sit in their skill set?

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Fire protection is its own field

THE PEOPLE

- Fire behavior and building hazards
- Sprinklers and special suppression
- Alarms, smoke control and life safety

Specialty and experience matters.

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The project manager keeps the job moving

THE PEOPLE

COORDINATION

- Current drawings in the field
- Open questions and changes
- Access for inspections and tests

OTHER JOB CONCERNS

- Trade sequence and schedule
- Costs and deliveries
- Access and occupied areas

Put questions on the job's action list.

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Sprinkler people know their trade

THE PEOPLE

DESIGNER

- Layout and hydraulics
- Products and function

FITTER

- Pipe and sprinklers
- Field changes

INSPECTOR

- Test and Verify
- Unresolved conditions

Trade knowledge is one of the checks the job needs.

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The insurer is looking at loss

THE PEOPLE

FIRE PROTECTION REVIEW

- Hazards and water supply
- Sprinkler design and products
- Changes affecting protection

OTHER LOSS CONCERNS

- Buildings and roofs
- Process and utility equipment
- Property loss and operations impact

Code review and insurer review have different jobs.

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The AHJ may have a broad assignment

THE PEOPLE

SPRINKLER QUESTIONS

- Applicable code and submittals
- Required inspections and tests
- Corrections and approval conditions

OTHER FIRE CODE WORK

- Exits, barriers and fire doors
- Construction features
- Other systems
- Response planning

We may be one small part of their entire focus.

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The owner inherits the system

THE PEOPLE

- As-builts and system information
- Test records and open items
- Inspection, testing and maintenance
- Changes in use, storage and ceilings

The next inspection needs the last answer.

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Credentials do not tell the whole story

THE PEOPLE

MECHANICAL PE

- Mechanical systems
- Heating and cooling
- Loads and distribution

FIRE PROTECTION PE

- Fire and hazards
- Suppression and alarms
- Life safety and smoke

ARCHITECT

- Building design
- Codes and coordination
- Construction documents

NICET / TRADE

- Defined system area
- Work experience
- Level and assigned role

The right credential still needs the right experience.

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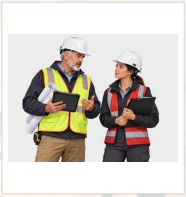
Get the right person on the question

THE PEOPLE

- Who owns this part of the design?
- Who knows this system or product?
- What did their review cover?
- What information are we missing?



They may know something you do not.

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Many people. One concern.

THE CHAIN

Owner Design Layout Review Install Inspect Maintain

Each handoff is another chance to catch it.

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Where assumptions can fail

THE CHAIN

What happens when others rely on a missed check?

Owner Design Layout Review Install Inspect Maintain

Relying on prior review assumes they were all correct.

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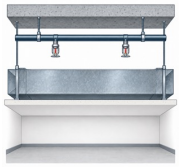
What if everyone relies on everyone else?

THE CHAIN

The engineer checked it. | The reviewer checked it. | The contractor installed it.



The issue remains and is accepted as normal.

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The normal path through a project

THE CHECKS

1. **Owner concept** — Use and intended work
2. **Design phases** — Criteria and coordination
3. **Shop drawings** — Layout, products and calcs
4. **Reviews** — Owner, insurer and AHJ
5. **Field work** — Install, inspect and test
6. **Turnover / ITM** — Records and future changes

Check the work, the information and the changes.

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30%, 60%, 90%, 100%

THE CHECKS

30%	60%	90%	100%
Use and hazard Water information	Systems and space Ceiling decisions	Trade coordination Open comments	Issued documents Defined scope

Most design progress is actually done in many smaller steps.

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From design to shop drawings

THE CHECKS

1. Design basis
   Criteria, plans and specifications
2. Contractor's designer
   Layout, products and calculations
3. Contractor check
   Engineering where required
4. Owner's design professional
   Review against the project documents

Design review and shop review are not the same task.

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Review is more than one stop

THE CHECKS

OWNER	INSURER	ENFORCING AGENCY
 Project documents Use and agreed scope	 Property-loss requirements Required insurer review	 Adopted codes Permits and inspections

Different reviews from different perspectives

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Example: reliance is in the rules

THE CHECKS

N.J.A.C. 5:23-2.15(f)4vi

"Building systems: Structural, electrical and mechanical designs performed and certified by licensed architects or engineers need not be checked in detail by the staff of the enforcing agency, but shall remain as the responsibility of the professional certifying such design."

"The AHJ Approved it" may not be reality.

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What this means:

THE CHECKS

- The AHJ does not have to verify all details.
- The certifying professional keeps responsibility.
- Details on drawings and computations are accepted when sealed.

A permit in hand does not mean the AHJ reviewed every detail.

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A permit or report has a defined purpose

THE CHECKS

PERMIT	TEST OR INSPECTION REPORT
Permission to proceed with the work. The code still applies.	Evidence about how it was when it was observed. Circumstances change

What do they actually establish?

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From pipe to final acceptance

THE CHECKS

DELIVER	INSTALL	INSPECT / TEST	TURN OVER
Right product Right application	Current plans Field conditions	Preliminary checks Final tests	As-builts Tests and open items

Each step in the process should be objectively viewed in that instant.

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Trust but verify.

THE CHECKS

FLOW TEST	SPECIFICATIONS	EQUIPMENT
Source and date Location and conditions Supply used in the design	Current revision Project requirements Conflicts and exceptions	Approved submittal Delivery identification Actual installed marking

Check the data before relying on it.

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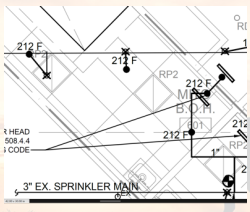
Design on Paper

CASE STUDY

- What do we see?
- What does it tell us?



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Installed Product

CASE STUDY

- Approved plans
- Active permits
- Built to the plans

Following the drawing does not mean it's correct.

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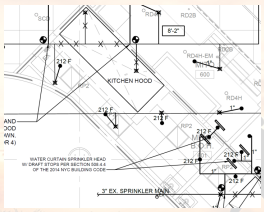
More Details

CASE STUDY

- The note calls for draft stops.
- What requirement is it addressing?
- Is that correct term?



When an item should have been caught in its infancy

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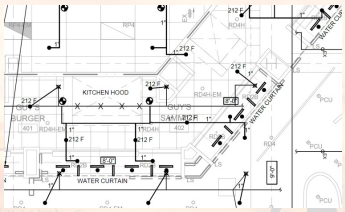
Case Study, Continued

CASE STUDY

- What do we see?



Is this technically correct or efficient design?

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Final Product

CASE STUDY

- What is the piece meant to do?
- What is it made from?
- How is it held in place?

Does this meet intent?

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A baffle has a job to do

CASE STUDY

- Protect the operating element.
- Meet the required size and position.
- Use solid, rigid material.
- Stay in place before and during sprinkler operation.

The material and its mounting have to be solid.

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Check the mounting

CASE STUDY

- What was the piece attached to?
- What fastener or anchor was used?
- Will the assembly keep its position?

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Where could the concern have been caught?

CASE STUDY

DESIGN / REVIEW	INSTALLATION	PRELIMINARY CHECK	FINAL ACCEPTANCE
Basis and arrangement Material and mounting	Actual field conditions Changes from the detail	Identify the concern Get the question answered	Check the correction Keep the final record

Which check was missing, and who follows it through?

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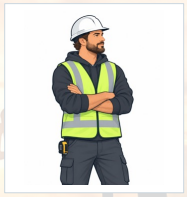
Communicating the issues

GETTING AN ANSWER

1. Record the actual condition
2. Confirm the basis for the concern
3. Tell someone who can act
4. Receive a response



Document clearly and build a record.

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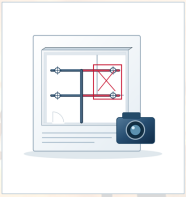
Make a record

DOCUMENT

- Location, system and date
- Photos, measurements and marked plan
- Drawing revision and product identification
- Question, recipient and written response



Find it. Show it. Date it. Keep it.

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A short message can be enough

COMMUNICATE

Subject: Ceiling baffles / design and mounting detail

The installed baffles appear to be bent plastic attached to the ceiling.

Please provide the applicable design basis and the material and mounting detail for this arrangement before this item is accepted.

Photos and a marked plan are attached. Please identify who will respond and the response date.

State the condition. Ask for the needed answer.

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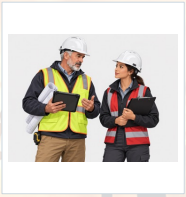
Explain the concern. Listen to the answer.

COMMUNICATE

- Explain what the detail is meant to do.
- Show how the field condition raises a question.
- Ask for information you may be missing.
- Keep the answer with the record.



Keep the discussions on the merits and the facts.

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Keep personalities out of the answer

COMMUNICATE

WHAT YOU MAY HEAR	KEEP IT ABOUT THE WORK
"It was approved."	"Does that review cover this detail?"
"We always do it this way."	"Can we check this application?"
"You are holding up the job."	"What answer lets us finish it correctly?"

A title, a loud voice or a deadline is not a technical answer.

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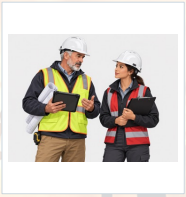
Who needs the question?

COMMUNICATE

- Your foreman or project manager
- The responsible designer or engineer
- The owner or construction manager
- The insurer or enforcing agency, when needed



Be sure to communicate issues clearly to the appropriate person.

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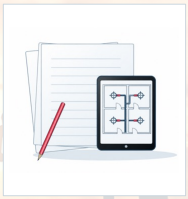
Get the response in writing

COMMUNICATE

- The decision and its basis
- The person responsible for the answer
- The work required and the date
- Anything still unresolved



"We talked about it" is not acceptable.

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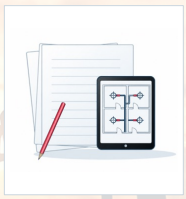
If the answer never comes

ESCALATE

1. Follow up
   Use the same issue and attachments
2. State the effect
   Protection, work and timing
3. Request action
   Named decision-maker and due date
4. Escalate as needed
   Keep the unresolved status visible



Silence leaves the item open.

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Match the response to the condition

ESCALATE

URGENT SAFETY CONCERN	DESIGN / CODE QUESTION
Immediate site response	Written technical question
Responsible owner and authority	Responsible design review
Required impairment or emergency action	Documented ruling or correction

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Use the right path beyond the team

ESCALATE

INSURER REQUIREMENT	Owner and insurer's reviewer
CODE OR APPROVAL QUESTION	Enforcing agency; written decision or appeal
LICENSED CONDUCT	Appropriate licensing or regulatory board

Involve the people who have authority over the issue.

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Keep one record from question to closure

FOLLOW THROUGH

EXAMPLE ISSUE LOG

ID	Condition / location	Assigned to	Due	Status
01	Baffle material / kitchen	Design professional	Agreed date	Awaiting detail
02	Mounting / kitchen	Project manager	Agreed date	Field check due

Keep photos, marked plans, responses and details.

Maintain records to show efforts and results.

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Close the condition

FOLLOW THROUGH

Answer
Specific basis and decision

Action
Work and responsible person

Verify
Completed field condition

Record
Final documents and status

The next person should be able to see how it was resolved.

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Sometimes you cannot get it resolved

PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

- Be clear about what remains unresolved.
- Involve company leadership and proper advisers.
- Decide whether you can responsibly remain involved.
- Address notice, safety and handover duties.

Withdrawal is a serious last step, but it may be an answer.

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Does the wording need to change?

CODES AND STANDARDS

1. Identify the gap
   Exact section and unclear condition
2. Propose wording
   What should the requirement say?
3. Explain why
   Technical basis and field evidence
4. Use the process
   NFPA input / comments; association support

Resolve today's issue. Improve tomorrow's projects.

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Stories from the field

ROOM DISCUSSION

1. What did you find?
   Describe the condition
2. Where do you think it could have been caught?
   Identify the missed handoff
3. What happened next?
   What fixed it or left it open?

Share the lesson, this is not to name and shame!

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Summary

CLOSING

- Check the items you rely on for your work.
- Communicate issues and ensure there's a response.
- Document the condition, response and decision.
- Follow through and check the correction.
- Keep it about the problem. Don't make it personal.

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Questions

ROOM DISCUSSION

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FOR CEU CREDIT:

- ✓ Badge scanned at start of seminar
- ✓ Attend full seminar
- ✓ Complete evaluation 1 of 2 ways:
  - ✓ Evaluation link is emailed to attendees with scanned badges
  - ✓ Event App by EventsAir
    - Login to app *(using your email & 6-character app pin)*

Only attendees who were scanned in will have evaluation access at end of session.

Thank you!

Christopher Campion

Eastern Fire & Safety, LLC

Scan QR code to submit questions for **Ask the Experts!**

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2027 Training Schedule

WEBINARS

1/6	Updates to NFPA 20
1/20	Calculating Pressure Reducing Hose Valves
2/3	Consumer Alert: Nitrogen in Sprinkler Systems
2/17	Reviewing Hydraulic Calculations
3/3	Updates to NFPA 13, 2028 Ed.
3/17	Updates to NFPA 13R & 13D, 2028 Eds.
4/7	Topic Coming Soon
4/21	NFPA 25: Roles & Responsibilities
5/5	Standpipe Flow Test Procedures
5/19	Storage 101
6/2	NFPA Technical Meeting - Voting Guide
6/16	Topic Coming Soon
6/30	Topic Coming Soon
7/7	Updates to NFPA 14, 2027 Edition
7/21	Adjacent Hazards & Design Methods
8/4	Acceptance Testing
8/18	Modifications to Existing Systems
9/22	Topic Coming Soon
10/6	Seismic 101
10/20	Proposed Updates to NFPA 25, 2029 Ed.
11/3	Evaluating Fire Pump Flow Tests
11/17	Top 10 Tech Reviews
12/1	Designing Water Storage Tanks
12/15	Pump Room Layout

PROGRAMS

Feb 9 - Mar 5 Apr 20 - May 14 Aug 3 - Aug 27** Oct 26 - Nov 19	Beginning Design School*
Apr 26 - May 7 Nov 1 - 12	Intermediate Design School*
Feb 8 - 10** Apr 12 - 14 Jul 12 - 14 Oct 11 - 13	Sprinkler Hydraulics Calculations Workshop
Apr 19 - 21 Oct 18 - 20	Advanced Hydraulics Calculations Workshop
Feb 11** Apr 30 Jul 23 Sep 24	Introduction to the Fire Sprinkler Industry
Mar 1 - 3 May 17 - 19 Aug 16 - 18 Oct 18 - 20**	NFPA 25 Essentials Workshop
Jun 7 - 10 Sep 20 - 23	Experienced Inspector Skills Lab
Mar 4 - 5 May 20 - 21 Aug 19 - 20 Oct 21 - 22**	NFPA 25 Fire Pump Workshop
Spring Summer Fall	ITM Inspector Development Program* *This program is 20 months.*

** Hybrid course **At General Air Products Lab, Exton, PA*

AFSA46

September 8-11	Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego, CA

For More Details Visit:
firesprinkler.org

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Dates subject to change. Programs subject to minimum registrations.

rev 9/14/2026

Virtual Instruction Path (VIP)

for Sprinkler Fitting Apprentices

Level 1 - Begins January 2027

Level 2 - Begins February 2027

Level 3 - Begins January 2027

Level 4 - Begins March 2027

www.firesprinkler.org/VIP

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HANDS-ON WORKSHOPS FOR 2027

FEATURING AFSA'S TRAINING LAB

NFPA 25 Essentials Workshop

Mar | May | Aug | Oct

Description: Understand roles, responsibilities, and NFPA 25 ITM procedures through hands-on testing of wet systems, dry systems, and fire pumps.

NFPA 25 Fire Pump Workshop

Mar | May | Aug | Oct

Description: Develop practical NFPA 25 fire pump ITM skills, including no-flow and full-flow testing, water supply graphing, and performance evaluation.

Introduction to the Fire Sprinkler Industry

Feb | Apr | Jul | Sep

Description: This course is designed for those new to the industry. An introductory, wide-ranging 8-hour course that provides a broad overview of core fire sprinkler industry concepts for those new to the field.

Experienced Inspector Skills Lab NEW

Mar | Sep

Description: Take your ITM expertise beyond the basics. Designed for experienced technicians, this course combines focused classroom instruction with hands-on system lab training to strengthen your application of current NFPA 25 inspection, testing, and maintenance requirements. Refine fire sprinkler testing practices, improve documentation, deliver more consistent service, and help reduce liability while reinforcing knowledge commonly covered on certification exams.

Learn more about AFSA's fire sprinkler lab featuring functional risers, a spray room, fire pumps, and an interactive classroom.

firesprinkler.org/lab