

# Where are we now?

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## Nick Hunt discusses the significant differences in guidance for installing sprinklers in Wales, Scotland and England

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Sprinklers have saved and do save businesses, properties and most importantly lives from the destructive effects of fire. But support from legislation and guidance for their inclusion in buildings varies significantly across the regions.

### Wales

Wales leads the UK in proactive legislation and guidance on the installation of sprinklers.

Since 30 April 2014, new and converted care homes, children's residential homes, boarding houses, halls of residence and some hostels have been required to install automatic fire suppression systems. On 1 January 2015, this requirement was extended to include new and converted houses and flats. Since 2007, it has also been a condition of Welsh Government grants that all new school buildings and significant refurbishment projects have sprinklers installed.

### Scotland

Since 2005, all new residential care homes, sheltered housing, covered shopping centres and domestic accommodation above 18m in height have had to be fitted with sprinklers. Warehouses storing some hazardous materials may have to be fitted with sprinklers, and where warehouses exceed 14,000m<sup>2</sup> in size, sprinklers should be fitted.

In 2010, schools were included in this requirement, although a Freedom of Information request has found that in recent years there have been instances of Scottish ministers allowing exceptions to the installation of sprinklers in such buildings.

### England

In England (and Wales), [Approved Document B](#) (ADB), Fire safety in buildings (vols 1 & 2, dwellings and not dwellings) to the Building Regulations identifies instances where sprinkler provision is required, and cases where it can be used by designers to relax or eliminate other requirements. Provision of sprinklers can be used, for example, to allow buildings to be built closer together ? half the spacing is required ? to extend travel distances to a fire escape and to increase the quantity of beds in a residential care home, as well as negating the need for self-closing doors and allowing delayed evacuation.



**Figures 1 and 2: Bedsits without and with sprinklers**

Specific requirements for life safety in the Building Regulations apply to residential blocks over 30m high, open areas in a shop, or self-storage buildings over 1000m<sup>2</sup> in size and single-storey buildings for industrial or storage use over 20,000m<sup>2</sup> in size. Rather than the prescriptive method used in ADB, [BS 9991](#) and [BS 9999](#) interpret the Building Regulations by using risk profiles that again allow the relaxation of some requirements.

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For new schools that are to be maintained by local educational authorities in England and Wales, [Building Bulletin 100, Design for fire safety in schools](#) (2014), identifies that "each year around 1 in 20 schools experiences a fire", most of which occur during occupation, and it recommends the installation of sprinkler systems. In an all-party debate on sprinklers in schools in October 2015, it was reported that in the period "April 2007 to May 2010 an estimated 70% of schools and academic buildings had automatic sprinklers installed ? However, since 2010 the figure has plummeted to 35%".

While the incidence of fires is falling, possibly in part due to evolving fire safety legislation, related guidance and modern means of risk mitigation, alerting and improving fire safety awareness, Wales leads the way in directing installation of sprinklers in the areas where most deaths from fire occur ? 66% of fire-related deaths in Britain in 2013?14 were in accidental dwelling fires.

The benefits of installing sprinklers are recognised by a range of interested organisations, and in December 2015 representatives from the fire safety, insurance and sprinkler sectors came together to agree a statement of intent to "present [sprinkler installation] to government as a cost-effective and efficient risk-reduction measure, with the aim of minimising the social, economic and environmental cost of fire". Publication of this statement is awaited.

Variations in application and regional disparities notwithstanding, the bottom line is clear: sprinklers save lives and property. They are a serious fire protection measure and we should give them the respect that they deserve.

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## **Further information**

Related competencies include:

- [Fire safety](#)
- [Legal/regulatory compliance](#)

Images ? BAFSA

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