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Protecting Fire Sprinkler Systems when Providing Heat Treatment for the Eradication of Bedbugs

The South Carolina State Fire Marshal's Office has received inquiries regarding the appropriate means of addressing fire sprinkler systems when performing heat treatment services for the eradication of bedbugs in buildings protected by fire sprinkler systems. Due to the sensitivity of this equipment, any work performed on the sprinkler system must be done by a licensed fire sprinkler contractor and cannot be done by the pest control firm.

Fire sprinklers rely on heat sensitive fusible elements (either metal soldered links or glass bulbs filled with liquid and air) to deliver water to areas affected by fire. Special precautions must be taken when providing heat treatments in areas protected by fire sprinkler systems as the high temperatures used in the process can activate fire sprinkler heads or otherwise damage them, leading to unwanted activations in the future.

When providing heat treatment services in buildings with fire sprinkler systems, pest control contractors should verify the following precautions are in place:

- Remove fire sprinklers in the areas undergoing treatment. Install plugs in their place.
- Maintain protection in unaffected areas. If only a portion of the building is undergoing treatment, the sprinkler system should be put back into service.
- Notify local fire marshal's office the fire sprinkler system will be out of service or partially out of service. Follow any additional precautionary measures required by the local fire marshal, such as fire watches.
- Replace the sprinkler heads after the treatments are finished. A licensed fire sprinkler contractor will complete the work and ensure the sprinkler system has been completely returned to service.

Other methods of dealing with sprinkler systems such as shutting the control valve, draining the system, or covering the sprinklers do not provide adequate protection for the sprinkler system and may lead to malfunctions in the future. Following these precautions should ensure there are no costly fire sprinkler system malfunctions and will help to maintain the life safety of the building's occupants.