



QUESTIONS FROM THE FIELD

Question: Can a facility store items within 18-inches of the ceiling in a sprinklered building?

Answer: Yes, if the storage is along a wall and is not directly below a sprinkler head.

The following information can be found on American Health Care Association's web page:
http://www.ahcancal.org/facility_operations/fire_life_safety/Pages/SprinklerDeflectors.aspx

(Section **A-5-6.6** below is a direct extract from *NFPA 13, Installation Standard for Sprinkler Systems, 1999 edition*. *NFPA 13* is the reference standard for the installation of sprinkler systems in the *2000 Life Safety Code*)

Although many nursing homes have been told that storage is not permitted within 18-inches of the ceiling in a sprinklered building, this is not totally correct. Some facilities have even been told to draw a line along the wall 18-inches below the ceiling and not to store above the line.

The purpose of the "18-inch rule" is to prevent storage or any other obstruction from interfering with the spray of water from a sprinkler head during a fire. It is intended to prevent a situation in which the obstruction is within 18-inches of the ceiling and might be between the sprinkler head and the fire. Since the only thing between storage to the ceiling along a wall and a sprinkler head is a wall itself, the Code allows storage to the ceiling. This would apply to storage on shelving units, wardrobes, etc.

There are two exceptions to the above, but it would be rare to encounter either of these exceptions in a nursing home. You cannot store to the ceiling along the wall: (1) if the storage would interfere with the spray from sidewall sprinkler heads; or (2) if the storage is directly below a sprinkler head. It would be rare to have sprinkler heads installed that close to a wall, particularly if the storage only extended one to two feet from the wall.

It is likely that if a facility has been cited for this deficiency in the past that the fire safety surveyor may be reluctant to allow the storage permitted in the Code. A facility can gain a lot of storage space if they are permitted to use the 18-inches along the wall in all storage areas.

(Extract from *NFPA 13, Installation Standard for Sprinkler Systems, 1999 Edition*)

A-5-6.6

The 18-in. (0.46-mm) dimension is not intended to limit the height of shelving on a wall or shelving against a wall in accordance with 5-6.6. Where shelving is installed on a wall and is not directly below sprinklers, the shelves, including storage thereon, can extend above the level of a plane located 18 in. (0.46 mm) below ceiling sprinkler deflectors. Shelving, and any storage thereon, directly below the sprinklers cannot extend above a plane located 18 in. (0.46 mm) below the ceiling sprinkler deflectors.

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