



Case Study

Talbott Hotel leads Chicago market with first CPVC fire sprinkler retrofit since building code revisions

Type of Construction:
Hotel

Installation Type:
Retrofit

Location:
Chicago, Illinois

Scope of Project:
Heads: 760
Sq. Feet: 100,000
Stories: 16

Fire Sprinkler Contractor:
Superior Mechanical Systems, Inc.

Prestigious Hotel Chooses BlazeMaster® CPVC Fire Sprinkler System to Minimize Downtime And Maintain Aesthetic Décor

Basil Kromelow, president and owner of Chicago's prestigious Talbott Hotel, is a firm believer in the benefits of staying ahead of the curve. The long-time hotel owner prides himself on offering his guests an unparalleled combination of personalized service and state-of-the-art amenities and facilities.

No wonder then that the Talbott Hotel, located on Delaware Place in the heart of Chicago's renowned Gold Coast, has become the first building within Chicago city limits to undergo a fire sprinkler system retrofit using CPVC pipe and fittings.

It was in December 2004 that Chicago's building code was finally changed to mirror other large cities in the country and allow the use of CPVC pipe for Chicago high-rise retrofits. At the same time, the City also passed highly debated legislation requiring that commercial buildings constructed prior to 1973 be protected with automatic fire sprinkler systems. Such legislation was a direct result of several high-profile, fatal fires that had occurred in unsprinklered buildings in the City. Under the new ordinance, building owners have up to 12 years to retrofit their high rises, with at least one-third of the work to be completed within four years and two-thirds of the retrofit to be done within eight years.

Even though The Talbott Hotel still had nearly the full 12 years to complete its retrofit, Kromelow decided to move forward with the project in early 2005.

"I had actually made the decision to retrofit the hotel about two years prior," said Kromelow. "But I wanted to time the work with some other planned renovations and upgrades, including the installation of a new electronically controlled heating and cooling system."

According to Kromelow, his decision to retrofit long before he was required to do so by City ordinance was driven by economic, as well as personal reasons.



"We knew that if we sprinklered, we had a better opportunity to pursue business that we couldn't in the past with a number of organizations," said Kromelow. "Many large corporations, as well as government agencies, require hotels to be fire sprinklered in order to list them in an approved company listing or directory. We estimate that nearly 20 percent of our requests are associated with fire sprinkler requirements. So with fire sprinklers, we can accommodate a broader range of clients. Plus, we knew we could realize a savings as a result of better insurance rates, thanks to the new sprinkler system."

From a personal standpoint, Kromelow points to peace of mind as a primary reason for wanting to retrofit.

"I had a fire in another building I owned many years go," Kromelow explained. "Although we were fortunate inasmuch as no one died, several people were taken to the hospital. There have also been a number of other tragedies in Chicago in the past few years in which people died from a fire in an unsprinklered building. Now I don't have to worry about a disaster due to fire. I can rest easy because when I go home at night, I know it's a safe building. That's a great feeling."

Kromelow considers himself fortunate to have been able to schedule his retrofit after CPVC was finally approved for use in Chicago.

"We were committed to this project anyway, but we leapt at the chance to use the BlazeMaster CPVC piping system because of the tight deadlines and challenges of working in and around an 80-year-old building," said Kromelow.



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The Talbott Hotel was built in 1927 and, even though it has undergone several major renovations, it offers the charm and décor of an Old World Victorian manor. It was the décor, as well as the age of the building, that truly made the BlazeMaster CPVC fire sprinkler system the only choice for The Talbott Hotel's retrofit.

"This job would have been next to impossible with steel pipe," noted Patrick Sullivan, president of Superior Mechanical Systems, Inc., the company responsible for installing the sprinkler system.

"The owner was very particular on how the installation was handled and how much of the existing architecture could be altered. We were able to conceal the BlazeMaster CPVC pipe behind crown molding or existing architectural features. The entire system is barely noticeable."

In addition to aesthetic considerations, Sullivan pointed out the challenges of working in a very old architecturally significant structure. "With all the bends, obstacles and uneven walls, this would have been an overwhelming project using steel," said Sullivan.

Since the owner was so familiar with the building's interior and structure, he played a very active role in helping to map out the actual installation.

"Because the owner worked so closely with us, we avoided numerous obstacles and, in many cases, were able to complete the job with minimal wall penetrations, instead of destroying larger portions of walls or ceilings," said Sullivan.

As with most hotel retrofits, occupancy was also a major concern, and time was of the essence. The fire sprinkler retrofit, as well as the installation of the new heating and cooling system, was targeted for completion during the hotel's historically slow sales season of January thru March.

The fast and easy installation of CPVC is what initially attracted Kromelow to the BlazeMaster fire sprinkler system. In many cases, a CPVC installation can be completed in one-third to one-half less time, depending on the size of the project and type of structure involved.

A one-step solvent cement joining system is used to install BlazeMaster CPVC pipe and fittings. This minimizes cleanup efforts since there is no oil



or metal debris left behind. Because the pipe is so much lighter in weight than metal, it is also easier to maneuver on the job site.

"Thanks to the BlazeMaster fire sprinkler system, we were able to complete the retrofit ahead of schedule," said Sullivan. That was good news for Kromelow, who hoped to finish the rest of his renovation work in May, in time for the start of the busy tourist and convention season.

The Talbott caters to both individual guests, as well as corporate business. Like many hotels in downtown Chicago, it is usually 80 percent occupied with corporate guests during the week. On the weekend, the leisure crowd takes over. Both audiences are attracted by the hotel's distinctive services and facility, as well as its enviable location. One block off of Michigan Avenue, it is walking distance from many of the better known shops and restaurants. Its suites feature 130-square-foot bathrooms, complete with his-and-her-vanities, and a private shower and commode area. The new heating and cooling system is electronically controlled as soon as the key card is activated in the door.

"I have owned this hotel for more than 40 years," explained Kromelow. "I am confident that we can stand toe-to-toe with any of the major hotels with our offerings. And now, I can also say we are one of the safest hotels in the city thanks to our new BlazeMaster CPVC fire sprinkler system. I hope this opens the door and more hotels follow our lead to make this an overall safer city."

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