



# TRIANGLE

Spring 2010 Edition

May 2010

## Letter from the President

By James Art

Greetings via the long awaited Triangle!

We have a new Editor, Sagiv Weiss-Ishai, our own Past President; and he intends to get the Triangle back on a quarterly basis. He needs your input, so please start thinking about it, and let him know if you have an idea or can write an article for the next issue.

Our June Meeting on June 15, 2010 will also be the **SFPE Smoke Control Seminar**. The keynote speaker, **Dr. James Milke**, Professor of Fire Protection Engineering at the University of Maryland and co-author of the *Principles of Smoke Management*, will present the theory of smoke management. These promises to be useful and worthwhile!

More information about the seminar on our website: <http://www.ncnsfpe.org/>

Please sign up! The price is very reasonable, yet because this is volunteer based, some of the money will support our SFPE Scholarship program.

The 2010 SFPE Scholarship was awarded on April 23, at the combined SFPE/Nor Cal Fire Prevention Officers meeting to Ms. Kamille Nixon. If you know anyone interested in next year's award, please tell them to check our website for details.

One of the most significant code changes ever for FPE's and the fire sprinkler industry- a requirement for fire sprinklers in all residential has already become law in California, and other states. It will go into effect on January 1, 2011 in CA. Applies to all new residential including single family, duplex, and apartment buildings, in an effort to save lives. Change is never easy, and SFPE members can help by explaining what sprinklers do, how they save lives and property, so the public does not just hear from developers who just harp on costs to them, without considering benefits to buyers, residents, and cities.

### Other Changes:

Many government and military construction projects now require the contractor to provide an independent FPE to review the project before it is submitted, and to witness the acceptance test.

Many state and federal agencies are now starting to require fire sprinkler plans be submitted for review with the rest of the construction drawings, not just "deferred" until later. This means fire sprinklers will be designed in, instead of tacked on after.

All of this is good, because it shows the public what a Fire Protection Engineer does, and should help with our effects to achieve registration parity.

Speaking of registration, Tim Callahan reports that Senator Gloria Negrete McLeod has indicated her intent to take over the bill. She plans to work for a resolution of the matter during 2010. She directed her committee staff to develop a resolution of the differences between proponents – opponents, leading to an interim hearing on the matter later this year. Result will probably serve as the basis for a new bill, introduced in Jan-Feb 2011 for the 2011-2012 legislative session.

We are making an effort to keep the website up to date - Please check there for the latest news, including upcoming meeting locations and speaker topics.

Thanks for all your support!

Sincerely,

JIM

## A note from the Editor

### NCN-SFPE Members:

In this publication you will find:

- Scholarship News
- NCN-SCPE Chapter Pictures
- Two interesting articles:  
**Our Profession vs. Not My Job** By James E. Art,  
**A Plea for Help** By Gilbert G. Bendix

The Triangle publication needs articles, ads, and other information that are of interest to our members for the future editions.

For example subjects could include:

Member(s) spot light of recent grads and P.E, new hiring/job, achievements;

Local events/news;

Local Government Fire Prevention Code Official's issues/reports;

Continuation of International SFPE issues and articles;

Educational, events, opportunities;

Insurance issues;

Fire Suppression/Alarm;

If you would like to contribute an article to the Triangle, please reply to the email address listed below. Your ideas and suggestions are also welcome.

We welcome anyone (non-members too) that may have something to contribute.

Thank you,  
Sagiv Weiss-Ishai, P.E  
Triangle Editor

The *Triangle* is published periodically by the Northern California/Nevada Chapter of the Society of Fire Protection Engineers. The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of SFPE, the Chapter, or the publishers. Contributions in the form of articles, announcements, and letters to the editor are encouraged. Please submit by either e-mail or mail in electronic format, with any photographs or drawings, to:

**Triangle— Sagiv Weiss-Ishai**  
Email: sagivwi@hotmail.com

## Scholarship News

Kamille Nixon, 42, of Moraga has received a \$2,500 scholarship from the Society of Fire Protection Engineers, Northern California/Nevada Chapter.

The organization awards scholarships every year to promote interest in the field of fire protection engineering.

Nixon is a student at Diablo Valley College and plans to transfer to UC Davis and ultimately Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, the only college in the western United States that offers a master's degree in fire protection, said SFPE representative James Art.



# NCN-SFPE Chapter – Pictures

## Monthly Meeting November, 21 2008. Uncle Yu's Lafayette



# Our Profession vs. Not My Job

By James E. Art,  
Fire Protection Engineer.

Probably many of you have the same concern: What to do when we see a fire violation outside of our job? Engineers can't just Turn It Off. We are skilled at seeing things and knowing if they are safe.

In our business, we can have a positive effect by bringing things to the attention of those responsible, so they can be fixed.

But what do you do when you see a violation in a public place, where you were not asked to do an inspection?

Recently I had a learning experience I'd like to share:

I have family in Texas, and we visit from time to time. Over the years, we often stay at the same large 3 story residence hotel, one of a fairly fancy, respected chain on the outskirts of Houston. On my first visit, I immediately noticed that the fire sprinklers were subject to a recall: They were the Central GB model, the one's with "O" Ring prior to the design change, around 1999. This was one of the largest, most well known, sprinkler "recalls" in US history (technically called the Voluntary Replacement Program).

Here is a picture of similar one. They were **recalled** because the O-ring that makes the seal might stick, and the sprinklers might fail to operate when needed. The ring or "skirt" doesn't matter. Note the flat top to the seal near the end of the red glass bulb, it is indicative of the recalled model.



For some reason, Central used the same model name for the replacement. Here is an image of a sprinkler similar to the newer Central GB, which is **not** recalled. Note the cone shape to the seal near the end of the glass bulb. You can usually see that from the floor.



These are very common sprinklers.

But please note that several other makes and many models were affected, residential, quick response, standard response, and dry and they do not all look like this, and some other manufacturers resemble these. For a more complete list and technical details start at:

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prhtml01/01201.html>

Do as I say, not as I did: I didn't say anything to the management.

I rationalized that there were still several years left for them to take advantage of the free recall, and there was a long waiting list once they applied. It was "not my job" to tell them.

But on my last visit, one evening I was using an exercycle in the gym, and right in front of me the whole time, was a fire sprinkler that had been painted a lovely off-white; it matched the painted ceiling. In the hall outside the gym, I encountered a man in a suit, with a name tag that said "Manager." So I mentioned that I was a Fire Protection Engineer, and the painted sprinkler. He was a nice guy. He was very interested and courteous. He took out his notebook, and asked me to show him which one. He said he was the owner of the hotel, which was a franchise. I asked him if he was aware that all the sprinklers were subject to a recall. He said "No," asked for more information, and wrote down the make and model. Then he said something that I still recall. He said that **he wished someone had told him earlier.**

At that moment, I wished I had told them about it sooner. Aren't I someone? Maybe I didn't need to send a letter or an e-mail, but I could have mentioned it at the front desk.

The free replacement offer expired in August 2007. Had the sprinklers been replaced under the recall, the building would have been safer, sooner, and the fire sprinkler industry would have a better reputation. Now it'll cost thousands to fix the whole hotel.

Later I e-mailed him the specifics on the recall.

Whose place was it to tell him? Perhaps the local Fire Department, or the insurance inspector? Maybe the hotel chain should have someone checking? I'll bet many people in the fire protection or the fire sprinkler industry had noticed it, and yet the shame of it is that no one said anything in time.

So now when I see something serious I'm more likely to mention it, and I suggest you do, too.

How many times have you observed a fire concern that could have a large effect?

We need to increase the public's awareness of fire protection.

And we need to maintain our good track record to justify their confidence.

If more people spoke up, there'd be fewer unsafe conditions.

I'd rather those that know *say something*, than read **the inevitable newspaper article** that says **the fire sprinkler system didn't work during a fire**. One of those times, people will die, needlessly.

Aren't YOU someone?

**About the Author:**

James Art, P.E. is now an independent fire protection consultant, who does Expert Witness, Plan Review, Field Inspection, Design, with emphasis on fire sprinklers, special extinguishing systems, construction disputes, and Building Code issues. He is a registered Professional Engineer, with over 25 years experience in various aspects of the Fire Protection industry including as the FPE for the City of Oakland, with the HPR Insurance industry, Fire Sprinkler contractor, and the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

Jim is making a list of recalled or questionable fire sprinklers.

He would appreciate any input!

Please contact him at: [JArt1@pacbell.net](mailto:JArt1@pacbell.net) Thanks!



# A Plea for Help

By Gilbert G. Bendix

I have a big advantage over the rest of you. I'm a member of the Great Depression generation. I never bought anything I couldn't afford. There were no credit cards, never mind sub-prime loans, available. The week my grandson got his engineering degree, he went out and bought a sports car for thirty-some-odd thousand; Instant gratification and pay later. And yes, Americans get the government that represents them. If they max out on their credit cards, what do they expect from Uncle Sam? Hopefully, China won't foreclose on us. But what has all of this to do with fire protection? Everything.

Once upon a time—not too many hundred years ago—fire prevention was the province of the fire insurance industry. I remember going to the fire department in the mid-1950s and being told to take my plans to the Pacific Fire Rating Bureau; if they gave their blessing, I'd be home free. Well, the Pacific Fire Rating Bureau is no more. The National Board of Fire Underwriters is no more. That venerable institution, staffed by highly qualified engineers, used to come around to each city about once a decade, thoroughly review its fire protection capabilities and issue a detailed report card. That report card was taken very seriously, particularly by the business community, since insurance rates affected the bottom line. By the early 1950s, we—San Francisco—had annual appropriations for correcting the various deficiencies for which we got dinged in NBFU's 1948 report. I was charged with planning the cutting in of additional gate valves in the water distribution system, while the guy across the aisle from me was working on replacement of undersized mains.

Half a century ago, the bean counters of the fire insurance industry decided it would be good for the bottom line to phase out their public service; if fire losses went up as the result of increased losses, they'd just raise the rates. No, they didn't word it that way, but that's the way I word it. In any case, it was the 'pay later' approach. By now, all of the NBFU engineers are dead or retired, and I suspect that some were pushed into retirement. The Insurance Services Office was the official heir to NBFU, but ISO is not even a shadow of the former entity. NBFU engineers used to provide the backbone of our chapter; today we haven't a single ISO member. Oh yes, somebody has been saving the money that went into NBFU—instant gratification, delayed conflagration. It looks to me like the mindset that bought my grandson's sports car and resulted in big tax cuts and a huge national debt.

As I survey today's SFPE members, whether in private or public employ, they're all involved in fire protection for individual premises, a warehouse, a hospital, whatever. Nobody works on community fire protection any more—except for yours truly. Since I don't have to work for groceries any more, I can do the unfunded, but...

But the one of me can't do the work of the entire staff of NBFU, nor am I nearly as good at it as they were and, as I look over my shoulder, there's nobody coming up behind me and, well, there's just an outside chance I won't live forever. So now I'm calling for help, your help. I don't know the answer to the question: How can we get back to a holistic approach to fire protection? How can we overcome the credit card approach to fire protection? By default, the burden has fallen on the shoulders of the fire service, but they have neither the know-how nor the juice of NBFU. There are now quite a few fire departments with fire protection engineers, but the latter look at individual premises, not at the number of gate valves in the water distribution system.

I'm afraid it's now up to you. I hope you will flood the *Triangle* with letters in response to my plea. It's also an opportunity for those of you working for the insurance industry to castigate me for maligning your employers. Go to it; prove me wrong.