



News Release

For Immediate Release

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## Crew Moves Stealthily Through Night to Protect and Serve

CHICAGO—No, it's not the S.W.A.T. team or undercover FBI agents—it's the crew of fire sprinkler retro-fitters from Great Lakes Plumbing and Heating Company. For the past 20 years, the special retrofit team from this Chicago based business has quietly installed fire sprinkler systems late at night in some of Chicago's most prominent buildings without the tenants ever knowing until they spotted the new sprinkler heads above. As Chicago deals with the tragic deaths resulting from recent high-rise fires, Great Lakes' expertise and methods are more relevant than ever for building owners and managers who are concerned about the cost and disruption of retrofitting.

"Many people have misconceptions about fire protection, and the benefits far outweigh the costs," says Great Lakes Executive Vice President and Head of Fire Protection Brian Conway. "We have met with clients who thought in the event of a fire all of the sprinkler heads would go off and create significant water damage." Sprinklers contain a fusible element and only when an individual sprinkler head detects a high temperature, about 165 degree F, will it trigger operation. Only the heads closest to the fire will go off to contain the fire. According to the National Fire Sprinkler Association 90 percent of all fires are controlled by four sprinklers or less. Water damage from sprinklers is very small compared to the damage that is created by firefighters using hundreds of gallons of water to put out a fire in an unsprinklered building.

In addition, new fire protection technology allows for specialized systems designed for clients' needs and lessens damage. In a building where vandalism may be an issue tamper-proof technology can be utilized such as a pre-action system that requires two activators, presence of

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heat and a smoke detector alarm to sound, for the system to engage operation.

"Disruption to tenants and construction mess are not factors with our turn key operations," states Conway. His crew with an average of fifteen years of retrofit experience for each fitter is accustomed to special installation conditions and often strange work schedules. Recently, Great Lakes retrofitted sprinklers in Northwestern Memorial Hospital Prentice Pavilion for Women. The exacting job required maneuvering around labor and delivery rooms, operating rooms, inpatient care floors, an ambulatory care clinic, a neonatal intensive care unit, and office space all operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Sometimes we'd go in at 2 a.m. and end at 11 a.m., other days it was 10 p.m. to 4 a.m.," Conway explains. "It really depended on our client's preference and what worked the best for them." During the construction process, Great Lakes has drywallers and cleaners come in to keep areas patched and mess free. Tenants experience minimum hassle. Conway claims that Great Lakes is the only company in the Midwest that for over 20 years has maintained such a highly specialized team that performs only retrofit jobs. He adds, "We'll continue to work this way because our clients expect flexibility and quality."

The initial costs of fire protection installation can be high, but it is an investment rather than an expense. The returns on fire protection take the form of lower insurance premiums, tax write-offs, reduced liability and increased ability to lease. Chuck Naso, president of Risk Management Services for Orland Park-based insurance brokerage The Horton Group, says retrofitting an existing building or updating to current codes can have a significant impact on property insurance rates. An owner can save as much as 75 to 80 percent in premiums on a sprinklered high-rise. If H.R. 1824 passes, the current depreciation period on a sprinkler system would be reduced to five years and owners would enjoy an increased rate of return on retrofitting.

Great Lakes has been receiving a higher volume of calls from building owners since the fire incident in the Cook County Administration building. The recent resurgence in the value of safety underscores a growing sentiment since 9/11. Tenants are increasingly demanding better safety measures in the places they live and work. After the recent fires in Chicago that claimed seven lives and left many more injured, tenants began calling owners asking when they would

see sprinklers in their building. Owners could be subject to lawsuits for loss of life or injuries due to a fire if their building is not up to current codes.

Despite some owners citing alternatives to sprinklers for fire protection, sprinkler systems remain the safest, most reliable method since its invention in 1874. According to the National Fire Protection Association, aside from fire fighting and explosions, there has never been a multiple (two or more) loss of life in a fully sprinklered building due to fire or smoke. Property damage from fire is reduced 43 to 70 percent by sprinklers in public assemblies, educational, residential, institutional, commercial, and manufacturing buildings. When installed properly fire sprinklers are not subject to human error, they automatically detect a fire and control it immediately to minimize damage and loss of lives.

Established in 1946, Great Lakes Plumbing and Heating Company is a full service mechanical contracting firm specializing in complex plumbing, mechanical piping, and fire protection. Within these fields, the company has the expertise and experience to design, engineer, fabricate, and install projects on a small to large scale. The quality of the company's work can be seen in such notable Chicago buildings as the Sears Tower, McCormick Place Convention Center, the Union League Club of Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Palmer House Hotel. Great Lakes employs over 300 sprinkler fitters, pipe fitters, plumbers, and office personnel from its Chicago office at 4521 W. Diversey Ave.

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