# Selected Published Incidents Involving Hotels and Motels

**One-Stop Data Shop**
**Fire Analysis and Research Division**
**National Fire Protection Association**

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This report includes articles from NFPA publications about fires involving hotels and motels. Included are short articles from the "Firewatch" or "Bi-monthly" columns in *NFPA Journal* or it predecessor *Fire Journal* and incidents from either the large-loss fires report or catastrophic fires report. If available, investigation reports or NFPA Alert Bulletins are included and provide detailed information about the fires.

It is important to remember that this is anecdotal information. Anecdotes show what can happen; they are not a source to learn about what typically occurs.

NFPA's Fire Incident Data Organization (FIDO) identifies significant fires through a clipping service, the Internet and other sources. Additional information is obtained from the fire service and federal and state agencies. FIDO is the source for articles published in the "Firewatch" column of the *NFPA Journal* and many of the articles in this report.

For more information about the National Fire Protection Association, visit www.nfpa.org or call 617-770-3000. To learn more about the One-Stop Data Shop go to www.nfpa.org/osds or call 617-984-7451.

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**Detection system alerts hotel occupants; guest, staffer injured, Illinois**
A fire detection system installed in the top-floor mechanical room of a hotel activated, alerting the occupants to a fire that injured a guest and a staff member.

The four-story, steel-frame hotel, which measured 150 feet (46 meters) by 150 feet (46 meters), had concrete floors, concrete walls, and a metal roof with a built-up roof surface. It was equipped with a fire detection system and a sprinkler system monitored by a central station company.

The fire department received an automatic alarm at 6:37 a.m., and firefighters arrived about four minutes later. They learned from building maintenance workers that there was smoke on the fourth floor, and crews found a fire burning in a boiler unit in the mechanical room. They extinguished the blaze before it could activate the wet-pipe sprinkler system.

Investigators said the fire appeared to have resulted from an electrical fault in the boiler control mechanism.

The fire department reported two civilian injuries. One civilian suffered possible smoke inhalation injuries while the other complained of chest pains. However, no further information was provided.

The hotel, valued at approximately $10 million, and its contents, valued at $3 million, sustained an estimated $10,000 in damage.

Kenneth J. Tremblay, 2014," Firewatch", *NFPA Journal*, November/December 35.

**Sprinklers control fire in hotel room, New Jersey**
Two sprinklers controlled a fire in an occupied hotel room that started when an electrical short in the cord of the wall-mounted heating and air conditioning unit ignited nearby combustibles.

The 134-unit, extended-stay hotel had concrete block walls with wood-truss floors and a steel-truss roof covered with wooden decking and asphalt shingles. The wet-pipe sprinkler system, which was connected to a fire alarm system that included smoke detectors, was monitored by a central station alarm company.

When the fire alarm system activated, the hotel staff notified the fire department, which also received a call from the alarm company at 6:16 a.m. Firefighters arrived about five minutes later and were told that the fire was on the second floor. Advancing two hose lines to the floor of origin, they forced their way into the room, where they found that the sprinklers had already brought the fire under control. They also found that the woman who occupied the room had managed to evacuate, uninjured, with her dog.

Investigators determined that the power cord of the room's wall-mounted heating and air conditioning unit shorted and overheated and then ignited curtains and a nearby chair and blanket. As the fire spread, it created enough heat to activate the sprinklers and enough smoke to activate the smoke detectors.

The amount of property damage from the fire was not reported, but all the hotel's occupants evacuated without injury.

Kenneth J. Tremblay, 2014," Firewatch", *NFPA Journal*, July/August, 33-34.

**Sprinklers control fire in hotel laundry, Missouri**
Two sprinklers activated over a burning cart in the laundry room of a resort, controlling the blaze until firefighters arrived to extinguish it.

The two-story, steel-frame building, which was 160 feet (49 meters) long and 50 feet (15 meters) wide, had a dry-pipe sprinkler system that provided partial coverage and was connected to a fire alarm system providing an automatic water flow alarm.

The fire alarm activated at 7 a.m., and responding firefighters arrived to find two sprinklers operating in the laundry room, confining the blaze to two carts, one of which was filled with dirty sheets. Fire crews removed the two carts from the building and extinguished the fire after unloading them and wetting their contents.

Investigators could not determine the cause of the fire.

The building sustained smoke and water damage estimated at $100,000, much of it confined to 14 industrial washers and dryers. The fire department report stated that "the sprinkler was effective in limiting fire growth." There were no injuries.

Kenneth J. Tremblay, 2014," Firewatch", *NFPA Journal*, January/February 34-35.

**Batteries in suitcase start fire in hotel room, Nevada**
Several 9-volt batteries stowed among clothes in a suitcase in a hotel room overheated and started a fire that was extinguished when the room's single sprinkler activated.

The two-story, wood-frame hotel was protected by a wet-pipe sprinkler system that provided full coverage. The water flow alarm was connected to a fire alarm system, which also provided detection and notification.

Investigators determined that the batteries, which were stored loose in the suitcase, which lay on a bed, overheated when they came in contact with each other, providing enough heat to ignite the suitcase's contents.

The building, valued at $1.75 million, sustained approximately $15,000 to $20,000 in damage. Damage to its contents was estimated at $3,000. There were no injuries.

Kenneth J. Tremblay, 2014," Firewatch", *NFPA Journal*, January/February 32-33.

**Woman dies in smoking fire, Washington**
A 71-year-old woman died of burns suffered as a result of a fire that started while she was smoking in her motel room bed.

The four-story, wood-frame motel, which measured 8,258 square feet (767 square meters), had an NFPA 13 wet-pipe sprinkler system that was monitored for water flow.

The fire department received the alarm from the alarm monitoring company at 5 a.m. Although responding firefighters found that two sprinklers in the room had already extinguished the blaze and that the smoke alarm in the room was operating, the victim, who was later found to have been intoxicated, died of burns.

The building, valued at $3.3 million, and its contents, valued at $1.25 million, sustained $300,000 and $80,000 in damage, respectively.

Kenneth J. Tremblay, 2013," Firewatch", *NFPA Journal*, July/August, 19.

**Sprinklers control motel fire with exterior origin, Maine**
Two sprinklers prevented a fire that began in debris and rubbish piled in an alleyway between a motel and another building from spreading far into the motel. The burning rubbish also threatened LP-gas cylinders about 100 feet (30 meters) away.

The single-story motel was 250 feet (76 meters) long and 75 feet (23 meters) wide. A wet-pipe sprinkler system provided full protection. An occupant of the motel said she heard a fire alarm sounding as she exited, but no other information was reported on any alarm system.

Firefighters received a 911 call at 12:43 a.m. reporting a structure fire and arrived four-and-a-half minutes later to find a fire burning in the alleyway between the two buildings near a public parking lot. Trash and rubbish were stored in this area, and one building had a designated smoking area near the scene of the fire.

Firefighters advanced a hose line and knocked down the fire in 15 minutes. Before attacking the blaze, two firefighters heard a sprinkler operating in an access way for the motel basement. A second sprinkler in the basement was also found to have operated, confining the fire to an area near its entry point to the basement.

When the fire department report was written, the cause of the fire had not yet been determined and the fire was still under investigation.

The fire caused no injuries. Heat damaged the vinyl siding of the building adjacent to the motel, and fire damaged the basement and some contents, but property damage estimates were not reported.

Kenneth J. Tremblay, 2012, "Firewatch" *NFPA Journal*, July/August, 22-23.

**Improperly stored combustibles ignite in motel fire, Virginia**
Although they used six of their eight fire extinguishers, motel employees were unable to put out a fire that began when heat from a gas-fired hot water heater ignited cardboard boxes full of recently delivered pillows, hair dryers, linens, and towels stored in a hotel laundry room.

The four-story, 257-room hotel, which also had three levels below grade, was of limited combustible construction and covered an area of approximately 200,000 square feet (18,600 square meters). It had an unmonitored, full-coverage fire detection system. There were no sprinklers.

Firefighters responded to an 8:33 p.m. call reporting a fire in the building and arrived two minutes later to find heavy smoke coming from the first-floor laundry room. The motel's occupants had already responded to the fire alarm and evacuated the building.

The building, worth more than $2 million, and its contents sustained approximately $45,000 in damage. There were no injuries.

Kenneth J. Tremblay, 2012,"Firewatch" *NFPA Journal*, July/August, 24.

**Sprinkler controls fire in hotel laundry room, Florida**
A single sprinkler activated and controlled a fire in a hotel laundry room, preventing flames from spreading, although light smoke damaged the first floor directly above the laundry room.

The four-story, 100-room hotel was equipped with a wet-pipe sprinkler system and several types of fire detection equipment.

Firefighters arrived at the hotel at about 11:30 p.m. to find an evacuation in progress. They could see no obvious fire, although they heard the waterflow alarm sounding. Soon, however, they noticed light smoke and haze in the first-floor laundry room, hallway, adjacent rooms, and the room above the laundry room. In the laundry room, they found a small fire that the sprinkler had confined to a commercial, gas-fired dryer.

Investigators determined that towels laden with grease had been washed, dried, and left in the dryer without any ventilation. The heat from the dryer eventually ignited the residual grease, and the resulting fire spread to the toweling fabric. Once heat and flames spread from the dryer, a single sprinkler above the machine activated and controlled the blaze until firefighters extinguished it.

Damage was limited to $11,000, and no one was injured.

Kenneth J. Tremblay, 2012," Firewatch", *NFPA Journal*, November/December, 27.

**Sprinkler controls hotel laundry fire, Kansas**
A 99-room hotel with seven floors above grade and five below sustained limited fire damage when a sprinkler activated and controlled a fire in a laundry room in the building's sub-basement.

The concrete-and-steel structure, which was 200 feet (61 meters) long and 120 feet (37 meters) wide, was equipped with wet-pipe sprinklers with a water flow alarm, and a fire detection system with heat detectors had been installed in the room of origin.

The central station alarm company reported the fire at 11:30 p.m. Firefighters initiated a high-rise response to locate and extinguish the fire, which they discovered in the hotel's fourth sub-basement.

Investigators determined that cotton and linen items contaminated with animal or vegetable oils had been put in a clothes dryer but removed before they were completely dry. They were put in large baskets while still damp, and the trapped heat warmed the contaminated materials to their ignition points.

The building, valued at $10 million, was undamaged, and its contents, valued at $5 million, sustained $5,000 in damages. There were no injuries.

Kenneth J. Tremblay, 2011," Firewatch", *NFPA Journal*, March/April, 27.

**Sprinkler douses hotel room fire, South Dakota**
A single sprinkler extinguished a fire involving the plastic cover of a fluorescent light and other combustibles in the bathroom of a hotel guest room before firefighters arrived at the scene.

The three-story, wood-frame hotel, which was 200 feet (61 meters) long and 100 feet (30 meters) wide, contained 93 rooms. Smoke detectors in the hallways and single-station smoke alarms in the guest rooms were monitored by a central station alarm company, as was the hotel's wet-pipe sprinkler system.

The room's occupants had called the front desk to report that they smelled smoke in their room when the fire alarm operated at 12:46 a.m. Responding firefighters found that a sprinkler located just 8 inches (20 centimeters) from the light fixture had already extinguished the blaze.

Investigators determined that arcing and resistive heating at the point at which the fluorescent bulb connected to the fixture had produced enough heat to ignite the light's plastic cover, causing it to melt or fall down onto towels below. Some heat damage was noted on the walls, but fire spread was limited by the sprinkler.

Damage to the hotel and its contents, valued at $3.1 million, was limited to $5,100. There were no injuries.

Kenneth J. Tremblay, 2011," Firewatch", *NFPA Journal*, January/February, 24-25.

**Man dies in motel fire, Illinois**
A 48-year-old man died of smoke inhalation and heat stress in an early morning fire of undetermined origin that began in his motel room.

The two-story, 73-room motel had concrete block walls and an original flat roof that was covered in 1985 with a second, wood-framed, pitched roof that created a 5-foot (1.5 meter) overhang over the second-floor balcony. This new roof structure, which was covered by asphalt shingles, ran the entire length of the building. The underside of the overhang was made of aluminum with ventilation penetrations. The motel's smoke alarms were not sound an alarm in the manager's office. There were no sprinklers.

A motel staff person discovered the fire when she went to investigate a commotion on the second-floor balcony and found guests who said that smoke was coming into their room. Grabbing a cordless phone, the staffer called the manager, who told her to check out the situation and call 911 if there was a problem. When she discovered black smoke coming from a guest room, she dialed 911 at 3:47 a.m.

She and a hotel guest then tried to enter the room sing a master key, but found that the door's dead bolt had been locked. With permission from the staff person, the guest kicked the door in, and that two saw flames around the bed and fire reaching the ceiling. They saw the victim on the bed, but heavy black smoke prevented them from rescuing him.

When fire fighters arrived, they found that the room's window had failed. They used hose streams from several directions to try to knock sown the heavy fire in the victim's room, but when they tried to ventilate through the room's ceiling, they saw heavy fire in the attic overhead. The incident commander ordered everyone out of the building for fear that the roof would collapse.

Investigators determined that the fire started near the base of the bed, but they could not determine the cause. Witnesses reported that they didn't hear any smoke alarms sounding when the room's door was forced open, and investigators found many of the hardwired smoke detectors in other rooms had been disconnected. Investigators also said that if the attic and second roof had complied with current codes, there would have stopped the rapid fire spread throughout the attic.

The fire spread caused an estimated $2 million in damage to the building and $250,000 to its contents.

Ken Tremblay, 2010, "Firewatch", *NFPA Journal*, July/August, 27-28.

**Fire damage to hotel exceeds $3 million, Illinois**
A fire that started in the attic of a 70-unit, three-story hotel burned until a passerby noticed it and stopped in to tell the manager, who called the fire department around 9:30 a.m.

The lightweight wood-frame hotel, which was 249 feet (76 meters) long and 58 feet (18 meters) wide, had a fire detection system that provided coverage in the occupied areas and a wet-pipe sprinkler system. The attic had no sprinklers, detection, or draft stops.

Responding firefighters saw fire coming from the center of the attic and spreading in both directions. The incident commander originally sent crews to the third floor but pulled them out of the building as the roof began to collapse within 15 minutes of their arrival. Crews then used three elevated master streams to knock the fire down before reentering the hotel to extinguish hot spots.

The fire heavily damaged the third floor and the attic, and water and smoke damaged the floors below. The exact cause of the fire is unknown.

Structural damage to the building, valued at $3 million, came to $2 million, while damage to its contents, valued at $1.5 million, was estimated at $1 million. There were no injuries.

Ken Tremblay, 2010, "Firewatch", *NFPA Journal*, September/October, 29.

**Sprinklers control hotel fire, Illinois**

Sprinklers operated to control a fire that began when a hotel guest fell asleep while smoking and her cigarette ignited the bedding.

The two-story hotel, constructed of concrete, was 100 feet (30 meters) long and 40 feet (12 meters) wide. It had a pitched roof covered with asphalt shingles. A dry-pipe sprinkler system and fire detection system were both monitored by an off-site fire alarm company.

Smoke from the fire caused the room's smoke alarm to activate, and this was followed by the activation of a sprinkler, which controlled the blaze until firefighters arrived at 1:11 a.m. The fire department completed extinguishment using a 134-inch (4-centimeter) hose line.

By the time firefighters arrived, the hotel staff and guests had evacuated, and all were accounted for except the occupant of the room of origin. She had been seen by either staff or other guests after she self-evacuated, but she left the scene shortly thereafter. When she was eventually located, she admitted to falling asleep while smoking, causing the mattress and bedding to ignite. Investigators determined that she was under the influence of alcohol and had stayed at the hotel so as not to drive home.

Fire damage was limited to the room of origin, although there was some smoke damage on the second floor and water damage in the room of origin, an adjacent room, and the room directly below the fire. The building, valued at $2 million, sustained $10,000 worth of damage. The contents of the room of origin, valued at $5,000, were a total loss. There were no injuries.

Ken Tremblay, 2009, "Firewatch", *NFPA Journal*, September/October, 26-27.

**Sprinkler controls hotel fire started by candle, Colorado**
A single sprinkler successfully extinguished a fire started by a candle in an occupied guest bedroom of a four-story hotel. The waterflow activated the building's fire alarm system, alerting guests and staff to the presence of the fire.

The 158-unit hotel was built of steel and concrete panels and had a flat, built-up roof. A wet-pipe sprinkler system provided full coverage and monitored waterflow tied to the fire detection and alarm system. Both systems were monitored by a central monitoring company.

The fire alarm operated at 12:25 a.m. and alerted the front desk staffer, who silenced the alarm. Occupants were advised to evacuate, and some went down to the lobby. Firefighters arriving within minutes of the alarm noted light smoke on the first floor and located the operating sprinkler in the first-floor guest room. By that time, the sprinkler had extinguished the blaze.

Investigators determined that a candle on the night stand between the room's beds ignited a T-shirt on the night stand, and the fire spread to bedding, mattress, and headboard of one of the beds. The room's occupant was in the bathroom when the fire started and told investigators, "When I came out of the bathroom, there was smoke and water everywhere." He was not injured. The hotel staff told investigators that guests are not allowed to use candles in their rooms.

Asked why she had shut off the fire alarm when it activated, the staffer admitted she was wrong to do so.
Damage to the hotel and its contents, valued at over $5 million, was estimated at $10,000 and $5,000, respectively. There were no injuries.

Kenneth J. Tremblay, 2009, "Firewatch", *NFPA Journal*, May/June, 38-39.

**Large-Loss Fire at Hotel and Casino Complex, NV**
$100 million
January 2008, 10:58 a.m.

This 3,020-room hotel and casino complex was 32 stories high, covered 114,773 square feet (10,663 square meters), and was of protected noncombustible construction. The complex was in use at the time the fire, with 2,400 rooms occupied.

The structure had complete-coverage smoke detection equipment that activated, and an evacuation was begun when the fire was confirmed. The complex also had a complete-coverage wet-pipe sprinkler system. Eighteen of the system's sprinklers activated when the fire caused windows in guests rooms on the 32nd story to fail, confining the interior fire to those rooms. The structure also had a full standpipe system and a diesel-powered fire pump.

The fire began when workmen performing cutting or welding on the exterior of the building ignited a layer of expanded polystyrene foam adhered to gypsum sheathing on the structure's architectural trim.

Upon arrival, firefighters found an exterior fire on the top of the hotel's tower. Evacuation of the hotel continued as firefighters set up unified commands and attacked the blaze using standpipes on the roof.

They also directed streams of water on the fire from windows on another wing. Fires in the guest rooms on the 32nd story were extinguished with hand lines after the sprinkler system contained these fires.

Thirteen guests were injured.

Stephen G. Badger, 2009, "Large-Loss for 2008," NFPA, Fire Analysis and Research, Quincy,

**Large-Loss Fire at Resort Spa, FL**
$12 million
December 2008, 9:51 p.m.

This four-story, 49-unit resort spa of unprotected ordinary construction covered 16,000 square feet (1,486 square meters). It was filled to capacity.

The spa had detection equipment, but the type and coverage were not reported. The system operated and alerted the occupants. It also had a wet-pipe sprinkler system of unreported coverage that activated, with 20 sprinklers flowing. The system was not fully effective, however, as it was not in the area of ignition. When the fire finally spread into the area of coverage, it was effective.

A fire of unknown cause began in a thatched palm awning on the second-story and quickly spread up and across the building's exterior, igniting second-story guest rooms as well as the soffit on the elevator tower. It also spread into an attic and down to the first-level dining area and bar.

The fire in the attic hampered firefighters, as the attic contained were hidden compartments resulting from multiple renovations. On other floors, firefighters found multiple levels of ceilings. The fire was deep-seated in heavy timber with wire mesh and stucco.

The loss was estimated at $10 million to the structure and $2 million to its contents.

Stephen G. Badger, 2009, "Large-Loss for 2008," NFPA, Fire Analysis and Research, Quincy, MA.

**Large-Loss Motel Fire, New York**
$10 million
November 2008, 12:26 p.m.

This one- and two-story, 114-unit motel of unprotected wood-frame construction was open and operating at the time of the fire. The ground floor area was not reported.

The motel had a complete-coverage smoke detection system that operated and alerted occupants and the fire department. It also had a complete-coverage wet-pipe sprinkler system. The system was not in the area of origin and was overwhelmed when fire spread into the area it covered.

The only information reported on fire development was that it began with an electrical malfunction in an attic.

The fire started in a void above a wooden tongue-and- groove ceiling and spread to an attic above the pool, then burned unchecked above the fitness area into guest rooms on the second story and into the motel lobby. The ceiling and roof collapsed during the fire.

Stephen G. Badger, 2009, "Large-Loss for 2008," NFPA, Fire Analysis and Research, Quincy, MA

**Large-Loss Hotel Fire, VA**
$10.27 million
September 2008, 10:40 p.m.

This four-story hotel of unprotected wood-frame construction was under construction. Its ground floor area and operating status were not reported.

No information was reported on its fire protection systems.

Upon arrival, firefighters found the four-story structure fully involved in fire. Embers had started several smaller fires in adjacent properties.

A defensive attack was begun, and the bulk of the fire was knocked down in 30 minutes. One firefighter was injured.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Stephen G. Badger, 2009, "Large-Loss for 2008," NFPA, Fire Analysis and Research, Quincy, MA.