

NIFSAB – Cook County Administration Building Fire Review

FIRE SPRINKLERS WOULD HAVE SAVED LIVES

On October 1, 2004, the consulting firm James Lee Witt Associates (JLWA) released its independent review of the Cook County Administration Building fire at 69 West Washington Street in Chicago, which caused the deaths of six occupants. The firm was retained to conduct a review of the incident by Gov. Rod Blagojevich a few weeks after the fire.

James Lee Witt Associates found more than 80 failures and other problems that contributed to the injuries and fatalities. Listed first among the four key factors that “directly contributed to fatalities” is “Lack of automatic fire sprinklers that would have controlled or extinguished the fire in its early stages”.

The JLWA report highlights the lack of automatic fire sprinkler protection in item number 70:

“Cook County Failed to Ensure that the Cook County Administrative Building was Compliant with State Fire Code through Installation of an Automatic Fire Sprinkler System or Engineered Life Safety System.”

The JLWA report found that either an automatic fire sprinkler or an engineered life safety system are required by Illinois State fire code, however both were lacking in the building. Under the 2000 Edition of NFPA 101, *Life Safety Code*®, an engineered life safety system was permitted as an alternative to sprinklers, however JLWA says no evidence of such a system – or a study to install a system – were found during the review. The 2000 Edition of NFPA 101 is currently in place; at the time of renovation the 1985 Edition was in place; the 1961 Edition of the code was in place at the time of construction (under the code’s previous name).

