

Loss Lessons: Trust . . .but Verify

In diplomacy, “Trust . . .but Verify,” is a good rule of thumb. It also works very well when applied to working with fire protection. Having an established policy that provides for a third party review of all fire protection installations can save money and keep your project on schedule, on budget and assure the proper functioning of your fire safety systems, thus reducing the chances of a loss from fire or water damage.



Sebench Engineering provides third party reviews for some of the largest corporations in the country. These firms have a corporate policy that requires that every fire protection project be reviewed by an independent third party at the design stage as well as at certain milestones during the installation of the project. A minor problem can be easily corrected if it is detected early, but can become a major issue if other systems, such as concrete slabs, ceiling and wall finishes, etc., are installed on top of the problem.

In one recent situation, the Fire Marshal was going to prevent a new school from opening in a few days. The Acceptance Testing of the fire pump found it to be unable to meet the system demand. Sebench Engineering was called in at this point and discovered that the underground lead-in was the wrong size pipe. At first, it seemed that correcting the problem would delay the opening of the school building by several weeks. Fortunately, an alternative means of correcting the supply problem was found that took only a few days to complete. School was able to safely begin on time.

Another problem occurred at a very large industrial construction site where miles of new 16-inch and smaller underground piping was installed, but never flushed or hydrostatically tested as required by NFPA. Due to the size and plumbing of the lines the amount of flow need for flushing it would not have been possible to flush if the sprinkler system been tapped into the supply lines before testing. By insisted that the lines be properly flushed and pressure tested before accepting we were able to locate numerous leaks which had to be repaired by the installer. Skipping this important requirement could have resulted in failure of the system later on, when the client would have paid for the very costly repairs.

Yet another example involved the improper installation of a properly designed sprinkler system. During the inspection it was determined that the sprinkler heads had been installed too low and improperly secured. Looking up from the floor, the problem was not obvious. By conducting the inspection, the very poorly installed system was discovered and needed to be raised several inches and properly secured. By catching this installation issue, Sebench saved the clients literally hundreds of thousands of dollars in construction repairs, possible insurability issues, and a false sense of security.

So make certain that you hire contractors that you can trust, but also use a third-party to verify that all systems are properly designed, installed and tested to assure your assets are properly protected.

Sebench Engineering is a SDVOSB providing Fire Protection Engineering Services. We can conduct Third Party Plan Reviews, Loss Prevention Surveys, Complete Design and Final Testing for all types of Fire Protection systems. Visit www.sebench.com for more information or email: info@sebench.com.