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Technology
in Action

Unusual Sprinkler Hose Lends Unexpected Flexibility

The advance of technology in the biotech and semiconductor industries has translated into good news for schools—at least for the Plano, Texas school system.

Sprinkler technology created over a decade ago for fire protection in semiconductor cleanrooms is now making its way into five of the district's schools. School officials decided to retrofit more than 4,000 center-of-tile sprinkler heads with the industrial-style system that uses hoses made from corrugated, flexible stainless steel surrounded by braided stainless steel. The hoses span what the sprinkler industry refers to as "the last six feet"—the space between the sprinkler main and sprinkler heads.

In many instances where new technology is to be installed, its adoption proves problematic at the outset. The Plano schools project was also beset by troubles, but not for obvious reasons. The system's installer, Golden Triangle Fire Protection, Denton, Texas, expressed initial reluctance to undertake the project—not because of the unusual sprinkler equipment, but because there was major concern about being able to meet this big and deadline-driven job in time for the fall semester. "I was sweating it," says Steve Nack, Gold-



Plano, Texas retrofitted more than 4,000 center-of-tile sprinkler heads in five schools.



en's president. "It was really going to be close, even though my guys were all psyched up for it."

Nack estimated that it would likely mean long hours—18 to 20 a day—and weekends to get the job done. But that was with the assumption that a traditional hard-pipe system would be utilized. The flexible system, however, allowed the contractor to install the 4,375 center-of-tile heads in nearly half that time. In fact, the first phase of the installation was completed four days before deadline.

The system also proved adaptable. In many cases, a piping plan needs to be altered due to unexpected barriers, such as walls or ducts, that only become evident once installers are on site. The system's flexible connection between water line and sprinkler head allows the hose to bend around objects and bridge difficult gaps.

The waiting game

Pipe installers were even able to stay a step ahead of the general contractor. Normally, the GC waits for the pipe installers to insert the sprinkler system before placing the ceiling grid. But with the industrial system, the installers were able to attach connector pipes to the sprinkler main, eliminating the need to cut pipe to precision lengths. Once the ceiling was in, installers simply snapped the flexible hoses into the grid.

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