

Blair quenches its thirst

A sprinkler system designed to aid firefighters in the event of a future fire is currently being installed in Blair Hall

By Sarah Whitney/Campus Editor

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Fire sprinkler installation began this past week in Blair Hall with the water line that will provide the sprinklers' water supply.

"Installation of the fire line has started," Steve Shrake, director of Eastern's physical plant said. "The tap was made to the city water main on 7th Street and has been extended to the rear of the building."

The line will be continued into the building once the building construction allows it, said Shrake.

"Fire extinguishers will be installed at the completion of the project but before occupants move in," he said.

The construction on campus is being funded by the reconstruction cost which is \$5.5 million, and the funds allocated for sprinklers are \$108,000, said Shrake.

Charleston Fire Chief Darrell Needs said that when installing sprinkler systems, it is more cost efficient to install them initially, or when the building is originally built, rather than adding them after the building has been completed.

"You would see that any new building built would have those," Needs said.

Before Blair Hall burned, the building was not outfitted with sprinkler systems.

Shrake said that when Blair was first constructed in the early 1900s, sprinklers were not required by city codes. "Actually, there may not have been a building code at the time," he said. "Some building types do not require sprinkler systems."

"Any building that's rental property, that's new construction, that's over four stories has to have sprinkler systems in it," said Chief Needs.

He said that most new buildings are required to have sprinkler systems installed, where as with the older buildings "it's expensive to retrofit sprinkler systems" so sprinkler systems are required.

With Blair Hall now being completely renovated, Shrake said that Blair has to comply with today's building code, which requires sprinkler systems and fire extinguishers.

"Fire extinguishers will be installed at the completion of the project, but before occupants move in," Shrake said.

Within the past three years, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville has had two fires occur on its campus.

Fire sprinkler systems are installed in all of SIUE's residence halls, but not in the university's apartment style housing, called Cougar Village, where both fires occurred.

"We have had two fires in our apartment-style housing," Bob Washburn, SIUE's director of facilities management said.

At present, Washburn said that SIUE has no plans to add fire sprinklers to Cougar Village where the fires happened.

However, both fires were of electrical origin, said Washburn. So the University did upgrade its electrical fire alarms



Media Credit: Daniel Williams

Chad Butler, carpenter for English Brothers, nails the subflooring over "sleepers" on the second floor of Blair Hall Wednesday April 27. Renovations are continuing this week with the sprinkler system being installed.

and smoke detector system in the apartment-style housing.

In the long run, fire sprinkler systems make firefighters' job easier.

"As long as it's sized properly and the sprinkler heads are placed properly, systems can be a very good asset to us," Needs said. "Sometimes, they put out the fire before we even get there."