

## Defective sprinklers still in use

By Peter Eisler, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — More than four years after the government announced the recall of 35 million defective fire sprinkler heads used in nursing homes, hospitals, schools and other buildings, almost two-thirds of them remain in use.

No deaths or injuries have been tied to the recalled sprinklers. But Tyco Fire & Building Products, the sprinklers' manufacturer, says there have been several claims of property damage. Virginia, Ohio, New York, New Jersey and Washington are among the states trying to identify facilities still using the sprinklers, the National Association of State Fire Marshals reports. **(Related story: [Recalls prompt re-examining of 'trade-offs'](#))**

"Will somebody die? If they don't get these (sprinklers) out, it'll happen, sooner or later," says Larry Glenn, deputy state fire marshal in Washington. "We've gone through nursing homes, boarding homes, assisted-living facilities, and a lot of them had (the recalled sprinklers) and weren't aware of it."

The recall began in 2001 after investigations found that a rubber O-ring in the sprinklers' valves can corrode and prevent the release of water. That occurred in 20% to 45% of the sprinklers in lab tests.

The sprinklers were sold under three brands — Central, Star and Gem — all since purchased by Tyco. Tyco began the voluntary recall under an agreement with the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). The company provides free replacement and installation.

Tyco has replaced 12 million sprinklers and identified 6 million more to be replaced by mid-2007, Tyco Vice President Carmine Schiavone says. "We'd like to find as many as possible."

Gib Mullan, head of compliance at the CPSC, says the recall is going "extremely well" and the replacement rate is better than average for such a big recall — the fourth-largest in commission history.

Many fire marshals think more can be done. Replacing 30% to 40% of the faulty sprinklers "is not acceptable," says Emory Rodgers, deputy chief of Virginia's Division of Building and Fire Regulation, which aims to get 90% of the sprinklers replaced. "People's lives could depend on it."

The 35 million faulty sprinklers equal about the number of sprinklers sold nationwide in a year, reports the National Fire Sprinkler Association, a trade group.