Wireless Fire Alarm Update

by Dean K. Wilson, P.E.

Question: **I remember that some time ago you wrote an article on wireless fire alarm systems and urged Authorities Having Jurisdiction to not have any reluctance to accept such systems when they have received listing by Underwriters Laboratories Inc. or Factory Mutual (FM Global) Approvals. Has the 2007 edition of the *National Fire Alarm Code* modified the previous requirements in any way? And, is anything new happening in this field?**

Answer: You're absolutely correct that I have no reluctance whatsoever to accept a UL listed or FM approved commercial wireless fire alarm system that meets the requirements of NFPA 72-2007, *National Fire Alarm Code*, section 6.17. I would caution you, however, to research the manufacturer quite carefully, as very, very few Low-power Radio (Wireless) systems have actually received UL listing or FM approval.

As to changes introduced into section 6.17 in the 2007 edition, the Technical Committee on Protective Premises Fire Alarm Systems made only a relatively few changes to this section. Those changes include the ones presented in the following paragraphs.

6.17.2 Power Supplies (1)—The Technical Committee has inserted the words "fire alarm" as a modifier for the words "control unit." In previous editions, most users would have considered the words "fire alarm" as understood. No significant change.

6.17.2 Power Supplies (4)—Once again, the Technical Committee has inserted the words "fire alarm" as a modifier for the words "control unit." In previous editions, most users would have considered the words "fire alarm" as understood. No significant change.

6.17.3.4—The Technical Committee has changed the amount of maximum response delay from 90 seconds to 10 seconds. This presents a significant change and brings this section into correlation with section 6.8.1.1. This section now reads:

> 6.17.3.4 The maximum allowable response delay from activation of an initiating device to receipt and display by the receiver/fire alarm control unit shall be 10 seconds.

6.17.3.5—Again, the Technical Committee has inserted the words "fire alarm" as a modifier for the words "control unit." In previous editions, as I stated previously, most users would have considered the words "fire alarm" as understood. No significant change.

6.17.4.2 and **6.17.4.2 (2)**—Yet again, the Technical Committee has inserted the words "fire alarm" as a modifier for the words "control unit." And, again, in previous editions, most users would have considered the words "fire alarm" as understood. No significant change.

6.17.5 (3)— The Technical Committee has changed the amount of maximum response delay from 90 seconds to 10 seconds. This presents a significant change and brings this section into correlation with section 6.8.1.1. This section now reads:

> 6.17.5 (3) The maximum allowable response delay from activation of an initiating device to activation of required alarm function shall be 10 seconds.

So, as you can easily see, the Technical Committee on Protective Premises Fire Alarm System has made very few changes to the text of this section, and even fewer substantive changes. This does not mean that wireless fire alarm systems have reached the end of their development cycle; quite to the contrary.

In answer to your question regarding new developments, Scott Barrett, the son of Low-Power Radio (Wireless) fire alarm system entrepreneur Phil Barrett—the creator of the World Electronics Low fire alarm system—has developed a whole new family of wireless fire alarm systems. According to correspondence I have recently received from Scott Barrett, these systems have reached the point in their development where they will soon complete testing at Underwriters Laboratories. Once they receive the appropriate listing marks, they will offer the fire alarm community a fully updated wireless technology.

I consider myself very privileged to call Phil Barrett a friend. I watched, with some delight, the development of his product and his hard-fought-and-won battle for acceptance within the code-development community. I consider the efforts that his son, Scott, is making to develop new products, as a very fitting tribute to his dad, who passed away in January of 2007.

If you would like to get a leg-up on learning about this new technology, I would suggest you point your web browser to the following web address:

www.wirelessfiretechnology.com.

When Scott's products earn the all-important UL Listing, they will offer fire alarm system designers and fire alarm system installers another innovative tool in their design and installation toolboxes.

As I stated in the previous article referenced by the questioner at the beginning of this article, don't be afraid of ***listed*** commercial wireless fire alarm systems. They offer an appropriate alternative to wired systems when circumstances of a particular installation dictate.

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