

LAFD

An Ounce of Prevention, And Then Some

Alive! spends the day with Fire Dept.'s Fire Prevention Bureau.



Story by Gedina Bergstrom, Club Counselor, with Fire Inspectors Mark Chase and Lloyd Fukuda; Photos by Angel Gomez, Club Member Services Manager

Before a building goes up in the City of Los Angeles it has to be approved by many City Departments. One group in particular, the LAFD, is part of the approval process, though most people are unaware of their involvement. I'm sure our *Alive!* readers are familiar with the big red fire engines and yellow fire retardant suits of the City Firefighters, but do you know who works hard to reduce the number of fire calls, thereby keeping Firefighters in the station? The LAFD's Fire Prevention Bureau.

Before high-rises, apartment buildings, places of assembly, places that use hazardous materials, schools, institutions (including jails and hospitals) and office buildings are erected, highly trained Fire Inspectors methodically plan-check and carry out inspections to make sure that the buildings are built according to code. The inspectors ensure that the required fire and life safety devices are installed and functioning properly and can alert the occupants with an early-warning system in the event of an emergency and allow them to evacuate safely. These safeguards also are present in existing buildings as well.

I spent an afternoon with Mark Chase, Fire Inspector II for New Construction, and Lloyd Fukuda, Research Unit Inspector I. We spent some time in the SB Spring Building in downtown L.A. Initially these buildings were filled with employees, but with the decline in the economy they sat empty for years. In 1999, an Adaptive Reuse Ordinance was put into place and building owners were able to convert their spaces into residential living. Inspectors like Mark Chase and Lloyd Fukuda make sure that all these spaces meet the requirements of the fire and life safety codes during construction.

Before a Fire Inspector even sets foot into a building, they are already identifying escape routes, water resources and access points into the building. Specifically, SB Spring has a fire department connection for the fire sprinkler system right outside the front door. As you enter the building, the fire control room – the fire and life safety brains of the building – is in the lobby. Fire and life safety systems that the LAFD inspects to ensure the safety of the building occupants, residents and responding fire department personnel include: fire alarm detection and notification, emergency power and lighting, fire sprinkler/fire pump and standpipe systems, elevators, stairwell pressurization and smoke control systems, various signage requirements, exiting systems and fire-rated construction.

We then walked through a unit where so many little things you never thought much about play a large part in the space being safe and habitable, meeting the approval of the LAFD. Another thing that stood out to me is that there is no "cookie-cutter" recipe for existing buildings or new construction. Each inspector, like Mark Chase and Lloyd Fukuda creates a new plan for every building they work on.

Be Prepared

Here are some words of advice from the



Lloyd Fukuda, Research Unit Inspector I, and Mark Chase, Fire Inspector II for New Construction, in the pump room below the SB Spring Building.

Fire Dept.'s Fire Prevention Bureau.

Fire prevention is an important topic for everyone, no matter where you are – at home or at work. Take a moment to look around. Do you have a fire escape evacuation plan? Do you know where your evacuation assembly area is? Do you have an out-of-state contact in the event of an earthquake or other catastrophic emergency that you and your love ones can contact to determine the status of each other? Do you know who your Floor Warden and Fire Safety Director are in the high-rise building you live in? Do you know where the two fire escape stairwells are on your floor?

As you can see, there are many questions to be addressed. Fire prevention affects us all, at home as well as at work. Many of us are not prepared for emergencies and just walk through life and forget to take an active role in fire prevention.

A few things to look for and remember:

- Have an emergency evacuation escape plan.
- Make sure you have functional smoke detectors.
- Frequently (monthly) test your smoke detectors and replace batteries when you adjust your clocks for or from Daylight Savings Time.
- Make sure to always turn off any space heaters when not in attendance.
- If you use extension cords, be sure not to overload them or run them under the carpet.
- Keep any open-flame devices including candles at least three feet away from combustible materials.



Fire Inspector II Mark Chase talks about his mindset before entering a building.



Fire Inspector II Mark Chase points out the little glass bulb in the center of a fire sprinkler that bursts when heated or hit so it can release water.

These are just a few; I am sure you can think of more. Talk with your family and have an emergency evacuation plan. Keep two multipurpose (minimum 2A10BC rated) fire extinguishers in the home.

Everyone has a responsibility to keep our community safe. Take an active role and be aware of your surroundings.

I want to thank Inspectors Chase and Fukuda for their time and all the important information, and Mark Stormes for his assistance.



Each floor must have a number associated with it. It might be a penthouse-level floor, but to a Firefighter it's the 12th floor!



Fire Inspector Lloyd Fukuda notes the mandatory escape route on each floor.



Anyone inside the SB Spring Building must be able to see at least two exit signs from wherever they stand in common areas in the building!



THIS MONTH AT THE

Griffith Observatory

Apr. 20:

Public Star Party

Free public star parties are held monthly with the assistance of the Los Angeles Astronomical Society and the Los Angeles Sidewalk Astronomers at the Griffith Observatory. They are a chance for the whole family to look at the sun, moon, visible planets, and other objects, to try out a variety of telescopes, and to talk to knowledgeable amateur astronomers about the sky and their equipment.

Lines for each telescope and all viewing must be completed by 9:45 p.m.

2 PM – 9:45 PM
FREE!

Information:
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