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All residence halls now equipped with sprinklers  
East, West Thomson last to receive systems  
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Jason Lee, on ladder, and Ronnie Smith, with Gwinnett Sprinkler of Lawrenceville, Ga., work on installing a sprinkler system in Thomson Hall dormitory at Winthrop Thursday on Aug. 14. Students who live on the Winthrop University campus can feel a little safer this year thanks to sprinkler systems installed in campus residence halls.

The university is one of the first of South Carolina's higher education institutions with older residence halls to have all of its dorms equipped with sprinklers, said Walter Hardin, Winthrop associate vice president for facilities and management.

"Sprinklers can save lives," he said.

Having all dorms equipped with sprinklers, Hardin said, was part of a 10-year plan that was created in 1999 to upgrade residence buildings. Wood-framed buildings such as Roddey and Margaret Nance already had fire sprinklers before the plan had been set up.

However, fire-resistant buildings made of masonry and steel did not have sprinklers. When those buildings were built, sprinklers weren't required in fire-proof facilities, he said.

The buildings that didn't already have sprinklers were Wofford, Richardson, Lee Wicker, Phelps and East and West Thomson, Hardin said. All of them have sprinklers now.

East and West Thomson were the last two residence buildings to have the sprinkler systems installed. The sprinklers were added over the summer.

"The completion of the sprinklers in these two halls completes our long-range plan to have all our halls sprinkled in 10 years," Hardin said.

Fire safety in residence halls has been a concern at colleges and universities across the country, and many schools have installed sprinkler systems as a safety measure.

The number of reported fires in college dormitories grew slightly, up 3 percent, between 1980 and 2005, when 3,300 fires were reported, according to the National Fire Protection Association, which creates and maintains standards for fire prevention. In the same time period, all types of structure fires were down 52 percent.

Fires in dormitories and other campus housing, such as fraternities and sororities, are most common between 5 and 11 p.m. and on weekends, according to the association. Nearly three-fourths of such fires involved cooking equipment, the group reports.

New Jersey enacted the nation's first state law requiring sprinklers in dormitories at colleges and boarding schools after a deadly fire on Jan. 19, 2000. Three students died and 62 were injured in a freshman dorm fire at Seton Hall University in South Orange, N.J.

Hardin said that having fire sprinklers in residence halls can allow more time for students to escape from a burning building. Sprinklers also may reduce property damage by containing fires.

Andrew Magness, a senior mass communication major, said that having sprinklers in all dorms is a great idea.

"You never know when a fire might occur," he said.

Sprinklers are always tested before students can check into their dorms, said Magness, who lives in Richardson Hall. "I always

feel safe in these buildings," he said.

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