

Is Spending More Money Always a Bad Thing?

How contractors around the world are saving money by spending it.

By Jonathan M. Trotter

Many of us in fire protection work feel privileged to make our living in a calling that has a noble aim. Our industry exists because we value a particular commodity very highly — *life*.

This article is about protecting more lives for less money. More specifically, it is about the use of flexible sprinkler drops to save money. Good contractors and designers are always on the lookout for better and less expensive methods of installing quality sprinkler systems. Can spending money on flexible drops actually *save* you money? Good question.

Count the Cost of Hard Pipe Armovers

No doubt about it: The materials cost of a hard pipe armover is less than that of a flexible sprinkler drop. A typical armover configuration consists of the following parts or minor variations thereof: a 2" nipple rising off of the branch line, a 90 degree elbow, a 1'-6" armover, another 90 degree elbow, a short drop nipple, a 1" x 1/2" reducer coupling, and the necessary hangers. Total cost of materials: about \$10.

Assume, for purposes of this article, that the cost of a flexible sprinkler drop assembly is \$23. Though Sidewinder flexible sprinkler drops by Gateway Tubing are available from distributors for less than this amount, we will use the figure of \$23 for our calculations.

Now compare materials cost: For a 500-drop job, the cost of materials is either \$5,000 (hard pipe armovers) or \$11,500 (flexible drops). But the materials cost is only half of the equation. What about labor costs?

It's a fact: Hard pipe armovers are slow, and therefore expensive to install. Assume that a two-man crew can install 15 armovers daily, and that each man is paid \$18 per hour. At that rate, it will take approximately 533 man-hours to finish the job, costing \$9,594 for labor (533 hours x \$18 per hour).

On the other hand, flexible sprinkler drops are fast, and therefore frugal to install. Contractors regularly report that fitters can install 3 to 4 times as many flexible drops in a day compared to hard pipe armovers (up to 60 per day or even more). Returning to our two-man crew installing 500 sprinkler drops, assume conservatively that they install 50 flexible drops per day. At that rate, it will take 160 man-hours to finish the job, costing \$2,880 for labor (160 hours x \$18 per hour).

So, now let's count the total cost for our job. Using hard pipe armovers costs \$14,594 (\$5,000 for materials and \$9,594 for labor). Using flexible drops costs \$14,380 (\$11,500 for materials and \$2,880 for labor). Thus, you save money by using flexible drops.

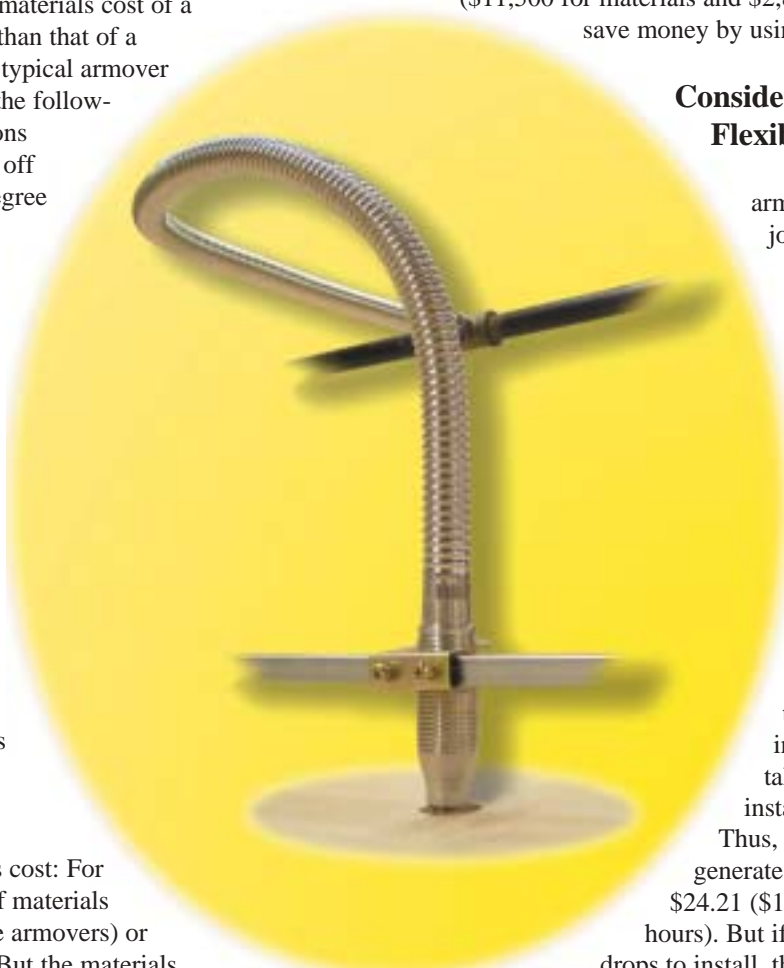
Consider the Profit of Flexible Drops

If you charge \$55 per armover for our 500-drop job, you will be paid \$27,500. Deducting your expenses from this amount, hard pipe armovers result in a profit of \$12,906 (\$27,500 minus \$14,594), while flexible drops result in a profit of \$13,120 (\$27,500 minus \$14,380).

But wait, we're not done yet! In our 500 drop example, the crew takes 533 man-hours to install the armovers, but takes only 160 man-hours to install the flexible drops.

Thus, for armovers, the crew generates a profit per hour of only \$24.21 (\$12,906 divided by 533 hours). But if you give them flexible drops to install, the crew's profit per hour more than triples to \$82 (\$13,120 divided by 160 hours). To be more precise, in this example, the use of flexible drops increases your profit per hour by 338%.

The figures for our example are summarized in the following table. Calculations are based on: a 500 drop job; a 40 hour work week; a crew of 2 sprinkler fitters; pay rate of \$18 per hour for each fitter; \$10 materials cost for each hard pipe armover; \$23 materials cost for each flexible drop



assembly; \$55 invoice amount per armover; 15 hard pipe armovers installed per day; 50 flexible drops per day.

	HARD ARMOVERS	FLEXIBLE DROPS
COST OF LABOR	\$9,594	\$2,880
COST OF MATERIALS	\$5,000	\$11,500
TOTAL COST	\$14,594	\$14,380
AMOUNT BILLED	\$27,500	\$27,500
PROFIT FOR EXAMPLE JOB	\$12,906	\$13,120
TIME TO COMPLETE	533 man-hours <i>(more than six weeks)</i>	160 man-hours <i>(two weeks)</i>
PROFIT/HEAD	\$25.81	\$26.24
PROFIT/HOUR	\$24.21	\$82.00

Shock and Awe

Contractors have discovered that building owners all over the world love flexible drops. You see, when you start using flexible drops, deadlines stay far, far away. You can complete so many more jobs in so much less time. Your building owners will be shocked and awed by your completion ahead of schedule.

Your crews will love the absence of oil, the lack of threading, and the disappearance of clean up. It's not that your crews are incapable of measuring, cutting, threading, and installing. It's just that they are so much more profitable when they just install, install, install.

And besides all that, flexible drops look better. The sprinkler head lands squarely in the center of the ceiling tile — time after time.

More contractors are using flexible drops in place of hard pipe armovers all the time. That's why there are millions and millions of flexible drops providing fire protection all over the world, with more being installed daily. Most contractors have decided that they like the future. And, so do their pocketbooks.

About the Author:

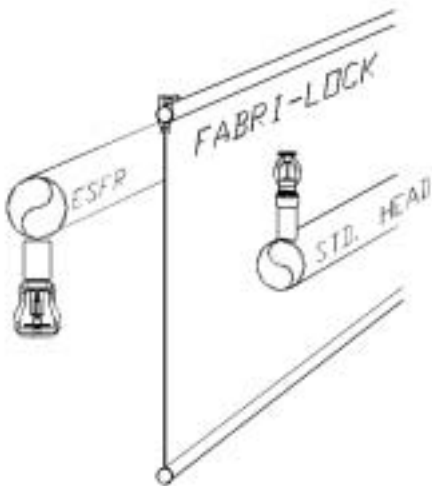
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Please Note:

The *2005 Sprinkler Industry Directory* is now in production.

It will be available in December, 2004.
Listing Information is Due: June 1, 2004;
*Look for a form in your mail,
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