



## American Fire Sprinkler Association

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Mr. Seago:

You asked the following question: “We have an attic with access for maintenance and inspections but with no storage. It’s built with limited-combustible construction. Can sprinkler protection be omitted?” In response to your question, we have reviewed the 2016 edition of NFPA 13 as the applicable standard. Our informal interpretation is limited access is allowed even when sprinkler protection is omitted.

What constitutes a concealed space has been regularly refined for the last several cycles. Access to these spaces is one of the determining factors. We are explicitly allowed access as discussed in 8.15.1.2.2 that states: *Concealed spaces of noncombustible and limited-combustible construction with limited access and not permitting occupancy or storage of combustibles shall not require sprinkler protection.* Defining “limited access” is the key. To address this issue, let’s use a large cavity within a wall that contains mechanical equipment. If there is a side hinged door into the area, it is considered a closet. If you have to remove screws from a panel (even if the panel is as big as a door), it is a concealed space. The best way to think about a concealed space is to ask whether it constitutes part of the occupied floor area (with associated egress requirements and so forth). An attic with a stair shaft and a side hinged door on the level of the attic floor would not be considered a concealed space. Such spaces where one has to climb a vertical ladder and go through an access panel or hatch is considered a concealed space.

If an attic with limited access is constructed of limited-combustible materials as defined in section 3.3.16 (along with controlling the placement of combustibles), then sprinkler protection can be omitted. There are also multiple exceptions for concealed spaces of combustible construction to omit sprinkler protection but they are general not such a large volume of space.

If you have any questions, please call me at (214) 349-5965.

The above is my opinion as a member of the NFPA 13 Committee on Automatic Sprinklers. It has not been processed as a formal interpretation in accordance with the NFPA Regulations Governing Committee Projects and should therefore not be considered, nor relied upon, as the official position of the NFPA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roland Huggins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R".

Roland Huggins, PE  
Senior VP Engineering and Technical Services

Cc: Dave Hague, NFPA Liaison (NFPA 13/13R/13D)

This informal interpretation has been prepared by the Technical Services department of the American Fire Sprinkler Association (AFSA). AFSA informal interpretations are provided by Roland Huggins, PE - Senior Vice President, Engineering & Technical Services; Russ Bainbridge, PE - Senior Fire Protection Engineer; Jason Williams, CET, Manager of ITM Technical Training; and Tom Noble, CET, Technical Programs Specialist. This is provided with the understanding that the AFSA assumes no liability for this opinion or actions taken on it and they are not to be considered the official position of the NFPA or its technical committees.