



*County of Sonoma*  
**FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

FIRE SERVICES \* EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT \* HAZARDOUS MATERIALS



MARK ASTON, DIRECTOR/FIRE CHIEF

## Informational Bulletin

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| <b>Date Issued:</b>   | July 11, 2010   | <b>Bulletin No:</b> | 2010-11N |
| <b>Topic:</b>         | Inspection Guide - General  |                     |          |
| <b>Code Reference</b> | Sonoma County Code<br>California Fire Code<br>California Health and Safety Code |                     |          |
| <b>For Use By:</b>    | Business Owners and Staff   |                     |          |

**NOTE:** This bulletin is a summary of Fire Services interpretations of County and State Codes. Information contained herein applies to typical instances and may not address all circumstances.

### INFORMATION BULLETIN - GENERAL INSPECTION GUIDE

A building is required by State and local regulations to be maintained in a safe condition at all times. It is important that the requirements of the California Fire Code, California Building Code, California Health and Safety Code and other applicable codes and ordinances are met. Any circumvention or ignorance of these minimum requirements, as well as a general lack of “common sense” could result in a disaster.

In an effort to help you understand and comply with some basic fire safety requirements, we have developed a simple inspection guide. This inspection guide is for your use and should be referred to often. It does not however, by any means cover every requirement and **does not take the place of A routine fire-safety inspection.**

This inspection guide is broken down into basic components that cover; Access and Water Supply, Egress, Fire Protection Equipment, Fire Resistive Construction, Electrical and Housekeeping.

#### ACCESS AND WATER SUPPLY

1. Address numbers must be posted and visible from every direction of travel. It is important that drivers of ambulances and fire engines be able to find you in an emergency. It is extremely beneficial for emergency responders if there is an address number that is illuminated by an outside flood light or other lighting source.
  
2. An approved access must be provided. There must be enough access to allow a fire engine to get to within 150 feet of all portions of all buildings. It is important that the ambulance and/or fire engine be able to get close enough to the structure to make an impact on the incident. Hose lines on fire engines are efficient to about 150 feet. Additionally, it is difficult at best to move an ambulance stretcher with a patient over a long distance. It may be necessary to trim bushes and tree branches to provide proper access. It is also important to install load limits on any bridges along the access route.



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3. There must be a “defensible space” around the buildings in case of wildfire or conflagration. If there is vegetation around the buildings, it must be maintained reasonably clear a distance of at least 30 feet from the structure. For more information on defensible space requirements please contact our office.

4. Water supply should be available for fire fighting. A fire engine only carries about 500 gallons of water, which will last less than five minutes during active fire-fighting. It takes a lot more than that to put out a well involved structure fire! There should be a fire hydrant or other water source near-by that is specifically dedicated for use by firefighters.

### **EGRESS**

1. There should be at least two remote exits from the building. If fire or debris blocks one exit, a second exit may be used to escape the building. Note that single story occupancies with low occupant loads may be allowed to have a single exit.

2. Occupants must be able to open exit doors without any special knowledge or effort. Occupants shall be able to exit to the outside without having to have a key, know a combination to a lock, operate confusing levers or slide bolts etc. If it is necessary to control the means of egress to prevent occupants from leaving the facility un-noticed, the exit doors may be equipped with an egress alarm. **In no case shall occupants be prevented from safely exiting the structure.**

3. Exit paths must be maintained unobstructed at all times. All occupants have a legal right to have access to all required exits. If chairs, tables, fixtures, trash cans, etc, are in the path of an exit, the exit is essentially useless. All exits and exit paths must be maintained clear. Public areas including; display aisles, exit paths and corridors should be maintained at least 36 inches in width. It is important to have this width so that occupants may easily exit in time of emergency.

4. The exits must be obvious to the occupants of the building. If the exit paths and doors are not plainly obvious, they will be required to have exit signs. A person who has never been in the facility should be able to easily find their way out in an emergency. Exit signs, where installed, must be properly illuminated and visible at all times. Exit signs with emergency power back-up should be tested monthly. (There is usually a test-button somewhere on the device to test it.) Exit signs should also indicate the exit direction if necessary.

### **FIRE PROTECTION EQUIPMENT**

1. Almost all occupancies are required to have fire extinguishers within 75 feet (travel distance) of all areas of the facility. There must be enough fire extinguishers for the facility and they must be of the correct size and type. The most common fire extinguisher requirement is; one 2A-10B-C portable extinguisher for each 3000 square feet of area. Each story in multi-story buildings is considered separately. Fire extinguishers must be mounted, and easy to locate in time of emergency. A hidden fire



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extinguisher is not an efficient fire-fighting tool. Fire extinguishers are required to be serviced regularly and must bear a service tag on the outside of the extinguisher. The usual **service frequency is yearly**.

2. Early fire detection is important in order to help save lives and prevent loss due to fire. The sooner a fire is detected, the early the alarm is initiated; and the early the alarm is initiated, the sooner fire suppression forces will arrive to extinguish the fire. If your facility is equipped with a fire alarm system it is required to be **serviced annually** by a certified fire alarm service company.

3. Some facilities, such as dining facilities, may have special fire suppression systems. It is important to ensure that the system is within the service interval. Most special fire suppression systems are required to be **serviced every six months** by a licensed fire protection company.

4. If your facility is equipped with a fire sprinkler system, check to see that the valves are in the correct position and that the system is functioning properly. Fire sprinkler systems are required to be **inspected quarterly** by a responsible person, and **serviced annually** by a licensed fire protection company. They are also required to be **"certified" every five years** by a licensed fire protection company. There should be a service tag somewhere on the system that indicates the last service date.

### **FIRE RESISTIVE CONSTRUCTION**

1. Most buildings are constructed such that if a fire occurs in an area, it could be contained within that area of the structure. This compartmentalization is usually accomplished by the use of "wall-board" or gypsum board over framing members. If there are holes in the walls, ceilings, etc., fire will be able to travel from one area of the building to another without difficulty, eventually involving the entire structure. Please make sure that any holes in walls, floors and ceilings are patched properly, and that any fire rated doors are properly maintained.

2. Crawl space and access hatches must be kept closed. Open crawl spaces and hatches create a means for fire to travel from one area to another. A small fire in an area can quickly become an inferno if allowed into an attic space or other area through an open access hold. It is important to make sure any open hatches or access covers are properly sealed.

3. Doors should operate correctly. Doors help to contain a fire within an area of the building. Some doors are "fire-rated" and have self-closers on them. Some may have windows in them with wire glass. All fire doors should be maintained in the same condition as when they were installed. For instance; doors should close properly, have no holes or gaps etc. Also note that "automatic fire-doors" with a means to activate them during a fire condition should be inspected regularly for proper operation.



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## **ELECTRICAL**

1. Extension cords are inherently dangerous. They have been known to be a contributing factor in numerous fires. If you must use an extension cord, use only approved (such as UL listed) large gauge cords. As a general rule, you should not use an extension cord with wire conductor size that is smaller than the cord of the appliance that you are using.

2. Poor electrical wiring is an electrocution hazard as well as a fire hazard. All electrical wiring must be installed in compliance with the California Electrical Code. This includes theatre lighting equipment. There is an entire chapter in the electrical code (520) on theatre wiring.

2. Circuit breaker panels must be maintained clear and must be labeled. At least 30 inches of clear space must be provided in front of all circuit breaker and electrical panels. In the event of a lightning strike, system overload or other malfunction, electricity may "jump out of" the electrical panel and ignite combustibles if they are too close.

## **HOUSEKEEPING**

1. Water heaters, furnaces and similar heat producing equipment have been a factor in many fires. It is important to keep combustible materials away from all heat producing appliances and equipment. The Fire Code requires that combustible materials be kept at least three feet away from heat producing equipment.

2. Mechanical rooms, electrical rooms and the like are also areas where combustible materials tend to be stored. It is important to keep these rooms empty of combustible materials to prevent fires and allow for proper access to the equipment.

3. Flammable liquids are an inherent fire hazard. Flammable liquids in the amount of 11 gallons or more are required to be stored in an approved flammable liquid storage cabinet. If you require more than 10 gallons of flammable materials, please store them in an approved cabinet designed for flammable liquid storage.

4. Many fires have started due to spontaneous combustion of oily rags. Fires in and around combustible rubbish will spread at an accelerated rate. Combustible rubbish and/or oil soaked rags are a by-product of some operations. Combustible rubbish and oil soaked rags are required to be contained in metal containers. Oil soaked rags are required to be placed in metal cans with tight fitting – self-closing lids.

5. Attic spaces and under-floor areas are poor areas to store combustible items. Fires in concealed attic spaces and under floor areas are difficult to suppress in ideal conditions. Combustible materials stored in these areas add to the fire load and will spread the fire faster. Attics with storage have been known to contribute to early roof collapse and have injured firefighters.



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6. Trash dumpsters are a target for arsonists and may be a fire hazard. Trash dumpsters should be housed in a non-combustible enclosure. Trash dumpsters should never be stored next to a structure with wood or other combustible siding, or under combustible roof overhangs. Move dumpsters at least five feet from combustible construction. Note that if it is necessary to place dumpsters near combustible construction, they are required to be protected with fire sprinklers.

Your cooperation in maintaining fire and life safety is appreciated. Remember, **FIRE SAFETY IS EVERYBODIES BUSINESS!** Information pertaining to some of the topics mentioned is available through the Sonoma County Fire and Emergency Services Department. If you would like further information you may contact the Sonoma County Department of Emergency Services at (707) 565-1152.