

Chapter 1

FIRE SAFETY

Fire Safety Plans

You are required to have a fire safety plan if there's a fire alarm system in the building. As well, many municipalities require a completed fire safety plan before issuing an occupancy permit for any new development. Even if you are not required to have a fire safety plan for your building, we recommend you develop fire safety and evacuation procedures to protect residents.

A fire safety plan has three primary objectives:

- To outline measures/procedures to control fire hazards.
- To provide direction to staff on maintaining fire protection systems.
- To give occupants direction on emergency evacuation procedures.

As part of the plan, you are required to appoint someone as Fire Safety Director and Deputy Fire Safety Director to administer the plan. Typically, the Fire Safety Director is a staff or Board member responsible for the development, but does not have to reside there. The director is responsible for ensuring staff have adequate fire prevention and evacuation training, and that fire safety and firefighting equipment are properly maintained. The Fire Safety Director or designate ensures the fire department is contacted, and acts a resource person to fire department personnel during an emergency.

The plan describes the physical components of the building, including detection, extinguishing and exit systems. The plan includes information on maintenance requirements, elevators, emergency power and lighting, electrical service, and garbage disposal at your development, as well as floor plans for each level of your building and a site plan of the full development.

The local fire department will review and approve your fire safety plan. Always keep a copy on site and available for the fire department. The plan needs to be reviewed annually, and inform the local fire department of any changes at this time. If you do not have a fire safety plan, contact your local fire department, Office of the Fire Commissioner, or a Fire Protection Consultant for assistance developing one.

Maintenance Requirements

Proper maintenance of fire systems and equipment is vital. Your fire safety plan outlines daily, weekly, monthly, and annual requirements for inspections and tests to ensure the equipment and systems are functioning properly.



A number of these checks are to be carried out by the Fire Safety Director or designate. A professional contractor must conduct the annual fire alarm inspection. Set up a contract with a fire protection company to have your fire alarm system, extinguishers, hoses, back flow preventors, sprinklers, and heat and smoke detectors inspected.

Smoke alarms in individual units may be tested by residents each month, and by the operator once a year and whenever occupancy changes. If battery powered smoke alarms are in use, replace the batteries once a year. Smoke alarms more than ten years old must be replaced. To determine the alarm's age, you'll find a date stamp on the back of the alarm.

Fire safety equipment must function properly to pass an inspection. If any equipment doesn't work, it must be repaired or replaced immediately.

Fire Safety Records

The following records must be regularly maintained and kept for at least two years. Copies of this information must also be available to the local fire department upon request.

- Records of all fires, drills and false alarms in the building — record the date, location, and a description of the incident.
- Monthly fire protection system tests and annual smoke alarm tests.
- Annual Fire Protection System inspections.

You must maintain a list of the names and unit numbers of occupants with disabilities who need assistance evacuating in the event of a fire. Update the list whenever there's a change, and store a copy in a location accessible to the responding fire department. This list guides firefighters in rescuing those unable to leave the building on their own.

Common Causes of Fire

Arson and cigarettes are the two most common causes of residential fires. Other causes are cooking fires in the kitchen, electrical fires from overloaded circuits, children playing with matches, and unsafe storage of flammable materials.

Almost all deadly fires occur in the early morning hours, because people are usually asleep when the fire starts and fewer people are awake to notice. As a result, the fire can escalate before it's noticed and before the fire department is alerted. Most people usually die during a fire from smoke inhalation or toxic poisoning from the gases given off by burning materials.

Fire Awareness and Training

The fire safety plan describes steps residents should take to vacate the building when the fire alarm sounds, and what to do if a fire starts in their unit. There are several ways to ensure people are familiar with this important safety information:

- Include a section on fire safety and evacuation procedures in a resident handbook and/or hand out fire safety brochures from your local fire department.
- Invite residents to an annual meeting to explain these procedures and provide handouts. This meeting also provides a good opportunity to involve your local fire department.
- Schedule a regular time to set off the fire alarm and conduct a fire drill and evacuation. Everyone in the building should be aware of the drill time. Each fire department has regulations governing the frequency of drills, so check with your local fire department.
- Post notices in hallways and entrances informing people what to do and who to call in the event of a fire. Make sure escape routes are clearly marked.
- Encourage residents to assist one another during an alarm. Some parents with young children, senior citizens, or people with disabilities may not be able to evacuate quickly. Advise people to offer assistance only if it will not put their lives in danger.

Ensure formal fire safety training is conducted for any staff members who work onsite on a regular basis. Your fire safety plan outlines the areas of responsibility for designated staff and additional items they need to be aware of, including procedures for:

- Sounding the alarm and notifying the fire department.
- Fighting minor fires.
- Evacuating the building.
- Assisting residents with disabilities.
- Operating fire extinguishers and water standpipe hoses.

Your local fire department should be able to assist you with some of this training, or you can attend training sessions put on by a local fire extinguisher company.

In addition, familiarize residents with the location and operation of safety equipment in their units, such as smoke alarms, breaker panels, fire extinguishers, and shut off switches for the water, gas, hydro and furnace. Label all shut off switches within units and common areas.



Fire Prevention

Provide fire safety information to residents when they sign tenancy or occupancy agreements. Include the following safety tips to protect their homes and families:

- Test your smoke alarms monthly. Do not tamper with them. Contact facility staff if there is a problem with their operation.
- Store flammable liquids such as paint thinner, solvents, or gasoline outside in a ventilated area, not in a basement or storage locker.
- Do not accumulate old newspapers, which become a fire hazard when stored.
- Be familiar with the building's fire safety floor plan and procedures.
- Know at least two ways out of the building, in case one escape route is blocked by fire.
- Encourage parents to draw a floor plan of the unit and plot at least two escape routes.
- Leave the building right away if the fire alarm sounds. Follow the fire escape plan.
- Call the fire department immediately if there is a fire anywhere in the building.
- Call the Caretaker/Building Manager if the smoke alarm in the unit goes off frequently. To help prevent setting off the alarm, keep the stove, oven, and toaster clean so they don't smoke.
- Leave firefighting to the local fire department. Use a fire extinguisher only if trained.

What To Do When There's a Fire

ACTIVATE THE ALARM

If you discover a fire at the development, the first step is to alert residents and staff by activating the nearest pull station.

CALL 911 OR THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

As soon as the alarm has been activated, phone 911 in areas with emergency 911 service. In other areas, phone the fire department. Be prepared to give the exact address and cross street, your name, and any additional information that's requested.

EVACUATE THE BUILDING

Ensure all residents know they must leave the building immediately if they hear the fire alarm. Residents should know at least two exit routes to use, in advance. These routes should already be posted and explained in previous fire drills and emergency evacuation procedures. Your staff should also be adequately trained in evacuation procedures.

Follow fire, police, and ambulance personnel instructions. Do not use the elevators. Move people quickly away from the building to the designated evacuation meeting place. Emergency response personnel will notify you if it is safe to go back in the building.



HELP PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

If the fire or smoke affects tenants who are unable to go down the stairs on their own, staff or other occupants may need to assist them in moving to a safer area of the building or outside. Further information is available in your fire safety plan. Remember to never put yourself in danger when assisting another person.

If you cannot evacuate residents with disabilities to a stairwell because of the fire and smoke, advise them to remain in their units with the doors and windows closed. Call the fire department and inform them that residents are trapped.

When fire department personnel arrive, give them a current list of residents who need assistance evacuating the building to help firefighters check on people unable to evacuate on their own.

PEOPLE CAUGHT IN SMOKE

During fire drills, fire safety meetings, and training sessions, advise residents and staff to:

- Drop to their hands and knees and crawl if they are caught in smoke during a fire, because the air is freshest near the floor.
- Hold their breath as much as possible.
- Breathe slowly through the nose, using a blouse, shirt, or jacket as a filter.
- Stay in the unit and call the fire department if they are unable to evacuate, and make sure the doors and windows are closed.