



# **APARTMENT FIRE SAFETY GUIDE FOR OWNERS AND MANAGERS**

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# INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

The Greenfield Fire Department (GFD) has developed this guide to assist apartment owners and managers in maintaining good fire and life safety practices. Section 13146.2, of the State of California Health and Safety Code requires every city or county fire department to inspect multiple family occupancies (3 or more units) annually. Upon completion of the inspection process, a certificate of fire clearance will be issued that is good for one year.

In this guide, you will find a list of specific items that will be checked during the inspection. Several items reflect possible hazards, both inside and outside the structure. Violations noted will be reviewed with the owner/manager who is required to correct the violations. The length of time given to correct the violation will depend upon the circumstances and severity of the violation and the hazard it creates.

By using this guide, owners/managers will have a better understanding of fire department concerns, and help you ensure your property is fire safe. Our goal is to work with apartment owners/managers to help them maintain a safe and livable property. If you have any questions, please call us at (831) 674-8425.

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## General Requirements

**Address Identification** - Street addresses and individual building numbers or letters are often difficult for emergency personnel to see while responding to an emergency. Visibility can be particularly difficult at night. Address numbers are required to be placed in such a position, so they are easy to see from the street or front of the property. Address numbers shall be a minimum of four inches high and their color shall contrast with their background.

**Smoke Alarms** - Each existing dwelling unit shall be provided with smoke alarms in all required areas to include:

In each sleeping room.

- Outside each separate sleeping area in the immediate vicinity of the bedrooms.
- On each additional story of the dwelling, including basements and habitable attics but not including crawl spaces and uninhabitable attics.

**Carbon Monoxide Alarms** - Each existing dwelling unit shall be provided with carbon monoxide alarms in all required areas to include:

- Outside of each separate dwelling unit sleeping area in the immediate vicinity of the bedroom(s).
- On every level of a dwelling unit, including basements.

**Dumpsters** – Dumpster fires at apartment complexes are common and can be very dangerous if they spread to adjacent buildings or vehicles. Maintaining a closed lid and keeping a safe distance from nearby walls or overhangs prevents fire spread. Dumpsters or containers in excess of 1.5 cubic yards total capacity shall not be stored within 5 feet of combustible walls, openings, or combustible roof eave lines.

**Locking Key Box** – A locking key box, also known as a (Knox Box), is a specialty item that securely stores keys that can be accessed by the fire department during an emergency. If you have a locked key box it is important to make sure the keys stored in it are up to date. If you have changed locks during the year you should have a new set of keys ready to give to the FD during your annual inspection. If you want a locking key box please ask the FD how to purchase one and they will provide you with the information.

**Housekeeping** – Areas inside and outside of the building and rental units shall be kept free of accumulated combustible materials. This reduces the chance of fire spread and makes it easier for firefighters to maneuver if they are called to an emergency at your property.

**Barbeques** Barbeque grills and other outdoor cooking devices shall not be stored on common balconies used for exiting or near combustible wall and overhangs. Additionally, they should never be used inside of garages or living areas. It is also recommended that they are not used on balconies or terraces. Ensure that your renters know how to dispose of ashes properly and know where to access a fire extinguisher if needed.

**Laundry Rooms** - A laundry room is another area of fire hazard. Lint and combustible debris can accumulate behind the dryer and can ignite when heated. As the property owner/manager, you can do the following things to keep your laundry rooms fire safe:

- Instruct your renters to clean dryer lint screens after each use.
- Dryer vents should be continuous to the outside.
- Clean dryer and washer motors as needed to eliminate grease and lint accumulation.
- Gas vents for water heaters and dryers should be maintained in good repair and continuous to the outside.

**Extension Cords** – Extension cords shall never be used as a substitute for permanent wiring. Additionally, they shall never be placed under floor coverings, run through walls or ceilings, and/or under floors. All extension cords shall be UL listed and come with fuses or circuit breakers. Extension cords shall never be modified or altered in any way from their original design by the manufacturer.

**Electrical Control Panels** - Providing and maintaining a minimum of thirty (30) inches of unobstructed access area in front of electrical control panels is required to allow emergency access.

**EXCEPTION:** Where electrical control panels are located in individual apartments.

Doors into electrical panel rooms shall be clearly marked with a plainly visible and legible sign, stating **ELECTRICAL ROOM** or other approved wording.

The disconnecting means for each service, feeder or branch circuit originating on a panelboard or switchboard shall be legibly and durably marked to indicate its purpose unless such purpose is clearly evident. For example, an electric main panel of an apartment complex should have the unit number or letter on the face of the panel box or switch. This labeling expedites the ability of emergency personnel to shut off appropriate circuits. Electrical disconnects to equipment should also be clearly labeled as to the equipment it serves; i.e., REFRIGERATION UNIT or AIR CONDITIONING UNIT.

# Exiting Requirements

An exit is a continuous and unobstructed means of egress to a public way, and includes aisles, doors, doorways, gates, corridors, exterior exit balconies, ramps, stairways, smokeproof enclosures, horizontal exits, exit passageways, exit yards, and courts.

## **Type of Lock or Latch**

Common exit doors shall be openable from the inside without the use of a key or any special knowledge or effort. Dead bolts, on common exit doors, are allowed if the dead bolt is activated with a single motion of the latch release device.

Panic hardware, when installed, shall be mounted at a height of not less than 30 inches nor more than 44 inches above the floor. The unlatching force shall not exceed 15 pounds when applied in the direction of exit travel.

Some apartment complexes have multipurpose rooms, meeting rooms, reception areas, etc. If the occupancy load for such rooms exceed 50 people, panic hardware is required. These exit doors must swing in the direction of exit travel, but the doors may also swing in (double acting). If the occupant load exceeds 100 people, exit doors must swing in the direction of exit travel only and **may not be double acting**

## **Obstructions**

Required exits shall not be obstructed and shall be free of any material or matter where its' presence would obstruct or render the exit hazardous. Obstruction shall not be placed in the required width of the exit. In most cases the minimum required unobstructed exit width is 44 inches.

## **Exit Signs**

Exit signs shall be installed at required exit doorways or change of direction in a corridor and where otherwise necessary to clearly indicate the direction of egress. Exit signs shall be well lighted and at least 5 inches high. Normal hallway lighting meets the minimum requirement of this section if the lighting is kept on.

Illuminated exit signs, where installed, shall be maintained in an operable, lighted condition at all times. Illuminated exit signs that are equipped with emergency battery backup systems, shall be in an operable condition at all times and tested every month.

# Portable Fire Extinguishers

## **Extinguisher Servicing**

The California State Fire Marshal requires that all portable fire extinguishers shall be serviced annually, by a company licensed by the State Fire Marshal, after use or when the gauge indicates recharge.

An approved tag shall be attached to the extinguisher indicating the seal of the State Fire Marshal, the registration number of the licensed company, name of the individual conducting the service, and the date the fire extinguisher was serviced.

## **Location and Mounting**

Apartment complexes are required to maintain extinguishers with a minimum rating of 2A:10BC accessible to all apartments and associated use areas. Extinguishers shall have a maximum spacing not to exceed 75 feet of travel distance and be mounted along normal exit routes of travel in common areas such as corridors, laundry rooms, recreation rooms, and places of assembly.

Fire extinguishers shall be conspicuously located and readily accessible along normal paths of exit travel. They shall be wall-mounted at a height of not less than 4 inches nor more than 5 feet. When extinguishers are not visible from the room or use area, signs shall be installed to indicate the location.

Apartment complexes with commercial kitchens are required to maintain a 40 BC fire extinguisher in addition to an automatic fixed fire protection system for hood and duct protection.

# Fire Protection Systems

## Fire Alarms

All parts of any fire alarm system shall be maintained in an operable condition at all times. Alarm system components shall be tested in accordance with applicable standards. The property owner shall provide documentation to the Fire Department of annual testing.

## Automatic Fire Sprinkler Systems

All automatic sprinkler systems shall be maintained in an operable condition at all times.

Fencing, land scaping and other features shall be built and designed in a way that does not interfere with fire department access and use of exterior fire department connections.

Automatic sprinkler systems shall have all control valves and water-flow devices electrically supervised and maintained by an approved central alarm station.

The water-flow and tamper devices for control valves shall be tested bi-monthly by a representative of the Central Alarm Station.

In addition, tamper alarms, all sprinkler control valves (OS&Y and P.I.V.) and individual floor shut-off valves are required to be locked in the open position. Breakaway locks and chains are a satisfactory method of locking the control valves open. Regular padlocks are permitted.

Main drain valves, control valves, inspectors test valves, fire department connections, etc., shall be accessible and clearly identifiable with respect to their function.

Brush, shrubbery, and other obstructions shall be maintained a minimum distance of 36 inches around all portions of the fire department connection, post indicator valve(s), or OS&Y valves for visibility.

A cabinet with a stock of appropriate spare fire sprinklers and a special fitting wrench for the removal of activated sprinklers is required.

**Ratio:** 300 sprinklers or less 6 spare

300 - 1,000 12 spare

over 1,000 24 spare

Painted automatic fire sprinkler heads are required to be replaced.

State law requires that all automatic sprinkler systems have maintenance inspections performed at least quarterly, with service tests at least every 5 years. Documentation of these inspections shall be available to the FD when requested.

## **Standpipe Systems**

Standpipe systems shall be maintained in an operable condition at all times. Brush, shrubbery, and other obstructions shall be maintained a minimum distance of 36 inches around all portions of the fire department connection, hose connections, and hose cabinets for visibility and use.

Fire hoses in cabinets shall be inspected for mildew, rot, cuts, or other defects which may cause the hose to fail to operate. Hoses shall be properly hung, and the cabinet clear of debris. Glass in front of cabinets shall be in place and not cracked or broken.

Caps for protection of fire department connections and standpipe outlets shall be replaced where damaged or removed. Fire Department connection swivels shall work freely without undue effort.

State law requires that all standpipe systems have semi-annual maintenance inspections and service tests at least every 5 years. Documentation of these inspections shall be available to the FD when requested.

## **Fire Protection System Maintenance**

The California Health and Safety Code, Section 13195 and 13195.5 requires that all fixed pipe fire protection systems be maintained and serviced by regulations established by the Office of the State Fire Marshal in Title 19, California Code of Regulations, Division 1, Chapter 5.

Fire department inspectors will check for a State Fire Marshal's tag on the system which will indicate the date the system was serviced, the contracting company, and State Fire Marshal license number. A copy of the certification of the service test should be forwarded to the Fire Department offices. They will also want to verify records for dates of semi-annual and quarterly maintenance by owner/managers.

## **Fire Hydrants**

The Fire Department shall have immediate access to fire hydrants at all times. Vegetation and other obstructions shall be a minimum of 36 inches from the hydrant. Fencing, land scaping and other features shall be built and designed in a way that does not interfere with fire department access and use of the hydrant.

