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A Guide for Owners and Managers



Menlo Park Fire Protection District

Fire Prevention Division



170 Middlefield Rd. Menlo Park, CA 94025 650-688-8400

APARTMENT OWNERS/MANAGERS GUIDE TO FIRE SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

The Menlo Park Fire Protection District Fire Prevention Division has developed this guide to assist the apartment owner/manager 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 to last one year.

In this guide you will find a list of specific items which are included in the inspection. Several items reflect possible hazards both inside and outside the structure. Violations noted will be reviewed with the owner/manager and shall be brought into compliance within a reasonable period of time, depending on circumstances and degree of hazard.

By using this guide, owners/managers will have a better understanding of fire department concerns, and help in the mitigation of violations. We believe that working with the apartment owners/managers and educating the occupants can only help to safeguard rental housing and make San Leandro a safer place to live.

If you have any questions, please call the Menlo Park Fire Prevention Division at (650) 688-8425.

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I. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Address Identification

Street addresses and individual building numbers or letters are often difficult for emergency personnel to see while responding to an incident. Visibility can be particularly difficult at night. Numbers or addresses shall be placed in such a position as to be plainly visible and legible from the street or road fronting the property. Said numbers shall be a minimum of eight inch high numerals that contrast with their background. Addresses are required to be visible day or night and internal or external illumination is required.

Fire Department Emergency Access Roads

Fire Lanes: Established fire lanes shall be maintained at all times to provide fire department vehicle access.

Signs: "No Parking - Fire Lane" signs shall be posted in plain view facing oncoming traffic, and spaced so they can be read from one sign to another, but no further than 100 feet apart.

Curbing: Curbing and, in the absence of curbing, pavement, shall be painted to reflect "**No Parking - Fire Lane.**" Signs may be used in lieu of painting pavement or as a supplement to identify fire lanes. Red curbing marked "**No Parking - Fire Lane**" in white letters shall be maintained in good condition at all times.

Turnarounds: When required by the fire department, turnarounds for fire apparatus shall be designated "**No Parking**" and maintained.

Owners are responsible to maintain these necessary elements for fire department access. It is important for owners/managers to inform tenants of this requirement. Additionally, vehicles illegally parked are subject to citation, towing, or both. Fire lane requirements are specified in the California Vehicle Code Section 22500.1 and 22658.

Smoke Detectors

Each existing dwelling unit shall be provided with a single station smoke detector. Existing installations may be battery operated or may receive their primary power from the building wiring. In dwelling units, detector shall be mounted in accordance with approved manufacturer specifications and located in the corridor or area giving access to the sleeping areas. Detector(s) shall sound an alarm capable of being heard in all sleeping areas of each dwelling unit.

When the valuation of a permit for an addition, alteration, or repair of an individual dwelling unit exceeds \$1000, smoke detectors will be required to be installed in all sleeping rooms as well as corridors or areas giving access to each separate sleeping room. Smoke detectors may be solely battery operated when installed in existing buildings.

Owner/managers shall be responsible for testing and maintaining detectors in hotels, motels, lodging houses, and common stairwells of apartment complexes and other multiple dwelling complexes.

Smoke detectors shall be operable at the time that the tenant takes possession. The apartment complex tenant shall be responsible for notifying the owner/managers if the tenant becomes aware of an inoperable smoke detector within the unit. The owner/managers shall correct any

reported deficiencies in the smoke detector or replace as necessary, and shall not be in violation of the Health and Safety Code section for a deficient smoke detector when he or she has not received notice of the deficiency.

The Fire Department recommends that tenants test each unit smoke detector at least monthly.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Carbon Monoxide alarms shall be operable at the time that the tenant takes possession. In dwelling units, alarm shall be mounted in accordance with approved manufacturer specifications and located in the corridor or area giving access to the sleeping areas. The apartment complex tenant shall be responsible for notifying the owner/managers if the tenant becomes aware of an inoperable smoke detector within the unit. The owner/managers shall correct any reported deficiencies in the smoke detector or replace as necessary, and shall not be in violation of the Health and Safety Code section for a deficient carbon monoxide alarm when he or she has not received notice of the deficiency.

Dumpsters

It is common to respond to dumpster fires at apartment complexes, and maintaining a closed lid and a safe distance from combustible walls or overhangs prevents fire spread to adjacent structures. 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.

NOTE: A stucco wall shall be considered a non-combustible wall for this requirement.

Dumpsters and trash cans up to 30 gallon individual capacity may be stored next to or adjacent to fences but shall not be permitted next to access gates.

Housekeeping

Apartment owners/managers shall maintain premises throughout in a neat and orderly manner, free from any condition that would create a fire or life safety hazard or a condition that would contribute to rapid fire spread.

All combustible waste material and rubbish kept in or adjacent to buildings shall be stored in approved containers until such time that it is removed from the premises or otherwise

disposed of in a proper manner. Approved containers shall be constructed of noncombustible materials.

Cut or uncut weeds, grass, vines, or other combustible vegetation shall be maintained and removed if it constitutes a fire hazard.

Electrical, Mechanical, and Boiler Rooms

Electrical, mechanical, and boiler rooms are not designed for storage of mops, brooms, boxes, or any other type of combustibles or flammable liquids. These materials become a ready fuel for a fire. Non-combustible storage may be permitted in electrical equipment rooms provided a minimum clearance of 30 inches is maintained at all times for access purposes. These rooms need to be easily identifiable for fire department access.

Clearance Between Combustibles & Heat Producing Appliances

Combustible materials such as brooms, mops, furniture, boxes, and other similar items shall be maintained at least thirty (30) inches from water heaters, furnaces, and other appliances generating heat or open flames.

Emergency Building Access

Key/lock boxes are required when access to an apartment building is unduly difficult or where immediate access is necessary for life safety or fire fighting purposes. A key switch shall be required on electric gates. Not all buildings will need a key/lock box. When a key/lock box is required by the Fire Department, owners shall provide a lock box containing suitable keys. Owners are responsible for mounting lock boxes at the fire department's specified location and supplying the correct keys. Usually lock boxes are located at the main entrance and may contain keys to other locked gates, utility rooms, or where fire alarm control panels and fire sprinkler risers are located. Whenever locks are changed, the fire department shall be notified so that they can put the proper key in the lock box.

Area or Occupancy Separation Walls

Fire-resistive construction shall be maintained, repaired, or replaced with approved materials in a manner equal to that of the fire-resistive rating of the wall.

II. EXITING REQUIREMENTS

Exits

An exit is a continuous and unobstructed means of egress to a public way, and shall include aisles, doors, doorways, gates, corridors, exterior exit balconies, ramps, stairways, smoke-proof 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**.

Doors

All exit doors shall be maintained in an operable condition. Doors opening into corridors that serve an accumulated total apartment space of 6,000 square feet shall be protected by 20-minute fire assembly or solid wood doors not less than 1-3/4 inches thick. Where the existing frame will not accommodate a 1-3/4 inch thick door, a 1-3/8 inch thick solid bonded wood door or equivalent shall be permitted. Doors shall be self-closing. Self-closing doors shall be maintained in an operable condition at all times. Exit doors shall be marked so that they are easily identifiable.

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.

Emergency Exit Illumination

Emergency exit illumination, where installed, shall be maintained in an operable condition at all times. Emergency exit illumination units shall be tested on a monthly basis for a minimum of 30 seconds. An annual test shall be conducted for a period not less than 1-1/2 hours duration. Records of all tests shall be kept on site for review by the Fire Department.

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.

Stairways and Ramps

Exit stairways shall be maintained properly. All required stairways shall have a minimum run of 9 inches and a maximum rise of 8 inches and shall have a minimum width of 30 inches, exclusive of handrails. Every stairway shall have at least one handrail. A landing having a minimum horizontal dimension of 30 inches shall be provided at each point of access to the stairway.

Interior stairways serving more than 2 stories shall be enclosed with walls of not less than one hour fire resistive construction. Where existing walls form part of the enclosure, wood lath and plaster in good condition will be acceptable in lieu of one hour construction.

Exterior stairways shall be noncombustible or constructed of wood with a nominal thickness of 2 inches with solid risers. Storage of combustibles beneath stairways is prohibited.

EXCEPTION: Storage may be permitted under interior or exterior stairways if such stairways are not within exit closures and such spaces are protected by one hour fire protection or automatic fire sprinklers.

Stairway Identification

Approved stairway identification signs shall be located at each floor level in all enclosed stairways in buildings 4 or more stories in height. This includes most buildings where there are underground parking areas and parking area rises a minimum of 6 feet above grade. The sign shall be located approximately 5 feet above the floor landing in a position which is readily visible when the door is in the open or the closed position. All signs shall meet fire department requirements.

Fire/Smoke Doors and Fire Dampers

Fire doors, windows, and dampers where required, shall not be wedged or propped open. Obstructions such as door holders, wood, and rubber blocks shall be removed from any corridor door or exit door which is required to be maintained closed, self or automatic closing. Examples of such doors are found in corridors and interior stairways serving more than two floors. Fire doors, windows, and dampers are required to have the testing laboratory label clearly visible indicating the fire protection time rating. Automatic self-closing device, fusible links, latches, and door hardware should be maintained operable in good condition and replaced where defective or damaged. This requirement also applies to corridor doors which are required to be rated. These doors include individual apartment doors that open on the rated corridor.

All smoke detectors installed on automatic closing fire assemblies shall be tested on an annual basis. When activated, the smoke detector shall cause the doors to close and activate the audible fire warning system.

Fire Escapes

Fire escapes shall comply with Section 310.14.6 of the 1995 California Building Code. Requirements include: approved and certified anchorage, design, and construction; an approved location; extend to the ground; clear opening of a minimum 29 inches not more than 30 inches above the floor or landing; etc.

III. EXTINGUISHER REQUIREMENTS

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.

IV. ELECTRICAL REQUIREMENTS

Electrical Hazards

Electrical wiring shall be maintained in a safe condition at all times. All identified electrical hazards shall be abated and, when required, corrected in cooperation with the local Building Department.

Individual fuse and circuit breakers should be labeled to the equipment, switches and receptacles, lighting, or other items and areas which they serve power to. If the circuits are numbered, a list may be written on the back side of the panel door identifying each circuit. **Circuit breakers should not be taped or fastened in the "ON" position.**

Cover plates are required on all electrical outlets, switches, and junction boxes. Should any sparking or arcing occur, proper cover plates will help to eliminate a possible fire spread. At no time should live wiring be left exposed.

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.

Extension Cords

"Zip" type and other extension cords are not permitted to be used, in any occupancy, as a

substitute for permanent wiring. U.L. listed fused or circuit breaker type power taps may be used for non-permanent or fixed appliances such as a calculator, desk lamp, typewriter, or other similar portable appliances.

All extension cords, including UL listed fused or circuit breakers electrical cords, shall not be affixed to structures or extend through walls, ceilings, floors, under doors, or floor coverings. Cords shall not in any area where they are subject to environmental or physical damage.

V. 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. 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.

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.

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.

It may be possible to remove some older standpipe systems. Removal, alterations, or changes to standpipe systems must be approved by the fire department through a formal application to the Fire Prevention Bureau.

State law requires that all standpipe systems have semi-annual maintenance inspections and service tests at least every 5 years.

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 Protection or Detection Systems for Additions or Remodels

Where required, automatic fire extinguisher systems and automatic fire detection systems shall be extended into every room or portion thereof in order to maintain protection or detection. Systems which are altered, extended, or repaired shall be done in accordance with applicable standards. Permit and approval are required to be obtained from the Fire Department prior to work being started.

Fire Hydrants

Fire hydrants and special standpipe hydrants located on the apartment property are considered private fire hydrants. Private fire hydrants shall be maintained in such a manner as to insure reliability. A maintenance procedure approved by the fire department shall be required annually by a contractor licensed by the State Fire Marshal. The procedure shall insure all caps and valves are in operable condition and control valves are in the open position. Hydrants shall be painted and maintained clear from shrubbery, weeds, debris, or obstacles. Curbs fronting hydrants shall be painted red to prevent access problems.

Smoke and Heat Detectors

Smoke detectors and/or heat detectors installed as part of a required fire protection system shall be maintained in operable condition at all times. Such systems include corridors, common areas, elevator recall, and fire rated assemblies.

VI.FLAMMABLE LIQUID REQUIREMENTS

Storage and Use of Flammable Liquids

Flammable and combustible liquids may be maintained on site by owner/managers for maintenance purposes and operation of equipment. Quantities of flammable and combustible liquids not exceeding 10 gallons are allowed to be stored outside of an approved storage cabinet when in approved containers located in a private garage or an approved location. An approved location can be a room that is protected by a door assembly having a one hour fire protection rating or a solid-bonded wood-core door 1-3/8 inches thick. These doors shall be provided with self closing device. Storage of quantities in excess of 10 gallons shall be in an approved storage cabinet.

Class I flammable liquids shall not be stored in basements, under floors or other areas where vapors may accumulate. It is important to remember that flammable liquids (gasoline, lacquer thinner, etc.) have a vapor density heavier than air and can travel to a source of ignition.

VII. POOL SAFETY

Each year, many water related incidents occur. These frequently involve young children, but adults can also be victims. Water related incidents not only include drowning, but near drowning, which can leave the victim severely brain damaged. Also, diving from other than designated areas can cause head and spinal injuries due to the victim striking his/her head on the bottom. Permanent paralysis can result. Alcohol consumption may precipitate water related incidents by impairing judgement.

- Adults, as well as children, should never swim alone. Children must always be directly supervised by a responsible adult.
- Provide approved life-saving equipment, such as a pole with a hook or a Styrofoam ring, in the pool area.
- Persons supervising others should know CPR.
- Interior perimeter pool fences should be installed. Fences should be at least 4 ½ feet in height, with self-closing and self-latching gates, which should be checked frequently. Vertical bars should not be spaced more than 4 inches apart.
- Keep pool area free of toys and other objects that might attract children.
- Keep tables and chairs away from the outside of the interior perimeter fence, so children cannot climb over the fence by using furniture or other objects.
- Do not allow pets in the pool area when young children are present.
- Post pool rules conspicuously and enforce them.
- It is recommended that a telephone be near the pool with 9-1-1 be posted for emergencies.

VIII. BARBECUE GRILLS

- Do not store barbecue grills on common balconies used for exiting.

- When cooking, the grill should be constantly attended.
- Keep matches, lighters and combustible liquids out of reach and site of children.
- It is strongly recommended that barbecues not be used on balconies or terraces.
- Let coals cool overnight or wet the ashes thoroughly prior to disposal. Dispose of ashes by placing them into a metal container with a tight-fitting metal lid.
- Have an approved fire extinguisher close by any community accessible grills.

VIV. 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.

- 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.

X. WORKING WITH THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

It is intended for the information in this handout to raise your awareness of fire and life safety issues and assist you in recognizing potential problems.

As an owner, manager or landlord, you have the ability to significantly reduce safety hazards by being observant and by following up on concerns forwarded to you by tenants.

Tenant Complaints

Occasionally complaints are received by the Menlo Park Fire Protection District and are evaluated. The first question asked is “Have you notified your apartment manager or landlord?” If not, it is usually suggested they notify the manager prior to any intervention by the Fire District.

If Fire District intervention occurs, an Inspector will first discuss the concern with the manager and perform an inspection to evaluate the situation. If a problem exists, the Inspector will then present recommended solutions to the manager and agree on a reasonable time frame for correction.

Manager/Landlord Complaints

If the tenant is maintaining an unsafe condition, the Fire District, when requested by the manager or landlord, will determine if intervention is called for and the type of intervention necessary. Often, as a manager or landlord, the lease may allow you the ability to act on a problem, depending on the nature of the situation.

Conditions affecting the health of the tenants and general public, such as overcrowding can be assessed by an inspection from San Mateo County Health Department at <http://www.smchealth.org/node/343> or Environmental Health Desk (650) 372-6200.