

Seattle Permits

—part of a multi-departmental series on City services & permitting

High Rise Emergency Drills

Updated November 2024

Requirements

Emergency fire and evacuation drills are required annually in high rise buildings, as specified in Section 405 of the Seattle Fire Code. As long as all occupants of the building experience an emergency evacuation drill annually, the conducting of drills on selected floors in the building can occur on a staggered schedule.

All building staff and occupants should participate in drills. There are exemptions for the following, unless they are also a member of the high-rise building staff; jail inmates, hospital patients, hotel guests and occupants of apartment or residential condominium units. Even though apartment and condominium residents are exempt from participating, they should be encouraged to do so.

Records should be kept to document emergency drills. The record should indicate the following:

1. Identity of the person conducting the drill.
2. Date and time of the drill.
3. Notification method used.
4. Staff members participating.
5. Number of occupants participating.
6. Special conditions simulated.
7. Problems encountered and corrective actions taken.
8. Weather conditions when occupants evacuated.
9. Time required to accomplish complete evacuation, lockdown, or shelter-in-place.

Conducting a Drill

In a fire drill, building occupants should duplicate as

closely as possible the actions they would take if a fire occurred. Total evacuation of a high rise building is not practical, and could even be dangerous. Drills involving selected portions of the building more accurately simulate the likely conditions during a fire emergency.

Emergency drills should be initiated by experienced building staff activating the fire alarm system. Immediately prior to the drill, the building's fire alarm monitoring company should be notified to prevent a Fire Department response to the building. When the drill is completed, notify the monitoring company that the building is returned to normal operations.

During a drill, tenants and staff should follow the established fire emergency procedures as set forth in the building's fire safety and evacuation plan. Keep in mind that during an emergency, people tend to perform those behaviors that they have practiced.

Announced and Unannounced Drills

Emergency evacuation drills may be pre-announced to building staff or occupants, or they may be unannounced. Consideration of the building occupants and the use of the building may determine which type of drill is most appropriate. For example, in a residential building primarily occupied by older adults or a mixed-use facility where medical offices may be located, it may be best to notify tenants of the date and time of the drill.

Critique the Drill

After each drill evaluate the fire and life safety systems, staff performance, tenant participation and make changes as necessary to improve future events. Ask for input from building staff and tenants regarding the evacuation process and drill coordination.

Suggested evaluation topics:

- Could building occupants clearly hear and understand the alarm and any additional instructions?



- Was the drill completed in an orderly and expedient manner?
- Did floor wardens guide occupants to safety, complete floor checks and report to building staff or the Fire Safety Director upon completion of the evacuation?
- Did individuals requiring assistance to exit receive the assistance they need?
- Were elevators avoided by occupants during evacuation?

Employee Training (SFC Section 406)

In buildings that are required to have emergency drills and fire evacuation plans, employees must be trained on the emergency plans and their duties. This includes fire prevention training, evacuation training (signals, evacuation routes, areas of refuge, exterior assembly areas and procedures for evacuation), and proper use of portable fire extinguishers and other fire safety equipment.

Related Information

For more information, please see the following SFD Client Assistance Memorandums:

- #5051 Fire Safety and Evacuation Plans
- #5971 Testing of Fire Protection Systems and Emergency Responder Radio Amplification Systems
- #5982 High Rise Fire Emergency Planning Requirements

SFD CAMs can be accessed here: <http://www.seattle.gov/fire/business-services/fire-code-and-fire-safety-documents#clientassistancememos>.

Additional resources for developing fire emergency plans, conducting fire drills, and training staff are available on the SFD Public Education pages: <http://www.seattle.gov/fire/safety-and-community/workplace-fire-safety>.