

# Seattle Permits

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

## Key Boxes for Emergency Access

Updated December 2018

The utilization of a Key Box for Emergency Access is optional except when specifically directed by the Seattle Fire Marshal.

### Knox Rapid Entry System

Used by Fire Departments throughout the country, the primary component of the Knox Rapid Entry System is a key box unique to the jurisdiction in which it is located. Only the Seattle Fire Department has the key to open Fire Department access boxes located within our city. Use of the system can improve emergency access to buildings and result in savings by eliminating property damage from Fire Department forced entry.

Use of the Knox Rapid Entry System is authorized by Section 506 of the 2015 Seattle Fire Code. The Code specifies that the Fire Department may require a key box containing access keys be installed at the entrance to structures or areas where access for the purpose of life safety or fire fighting is restricted. While the Fire Department can require that a Knox Entry System is installed, in most instances installation of the system will be at the option of the building owner.

The KnoxBox 3200 Series and the KnoxVault 4400 Series (models with hinged doors, single lock, and black in color) are the only boxes approved for new installations in the City of Seattle. The Recessed Mount models are recommended for a more secure installation, but not required. A Knox Multi-Purpose Electrical Switch for tamper detection is another security option that may be installed inside the box. The KnoxBox 3200 may also be utilized to house an Emergency Use Switch for entry gates. Properties with

pre-existing Knox models are still valid. However, the key lock core may need to be updated to match the most current City of Seattle Fire Department access key. Additionally, the Seattle Fire Marshal may require the reinstallation or the discontinued use of any KnoxBox/ KnoxVault that does not meet secure installation standards. Examples of structures for which a rapid entry key box may be beneficial include:

- Warehouse, industrial, commercial and other buildings where 24 hour staffing / security is not available.
- Buildings constructed such that Fire Department forced entry, if required, would be unduly difficult or likely result in significant property damage.
- Buildings with a high frequency of emergency response incidents and where occupants may be endangered due to delays gaining access.
- Hospitals, nursing home and high-rise buildings.
- Hazardous materials occupancies.

### How Does it Work?

A building owner purchases, installs, or arranges for installation, of a Knox key box on the exterior of the building at the main entrance point. The box is manufactured with a lock which can be opened only with a key that is issued solely to the Seattle Fire Department. Medical aid units and fire trucks in Seattle are each equipped with one KnoxBox key, held in a special security device.

When *emergency* access is required, the arriving Fire Department member in charge removes the key from the special security device in their Fire Department vehicle and opens the KnoxBox to remove the building main entrance key. After use, the Fire Department member returns the entrance key to the key box and locks it, and then returns the special KnoxBox key to the security device inside the emergency vehicle.



## Steps for Installing the Knox Rapid Entry System

When an occupancy chooses or is directed to install a key box, a model 3200 or 4400 (single lock) series box may be purchased directly from the Knox Company or authorized Knox retailer. Where installation allows, a recessed box is recommended. Upon purchase, the KnoxBox will be shipped directly from the manufacturer to the purchaser absent its locking mechanism. The locking mechanism is simultaneously shipped to and remains in the possession of the Seattle Fire Department until the box installation has been approved by the Fire Department. The purchaser also requests the installation instructions for their specific type of installation at this time by sending an email to [SFD\\_FMO\\_KnoxBox@seattle.gov](mailto:SFD_FMO_KnoxBox@seattle.gov) or calling the Seattle Fire Prevention Division at (206) 386-1450.

The purchaser installs the empty box according to the Seattle Fire Department standards which meet the requirements of the Knox Company. Do not forget to take photos of the installation progress as written in the installation instructions. These will be kept on file as verification of proper installation. Once the box is installed, the purchaser makes an appointment to meet a Seattle Fire Department Inspector at the building to approve the box location and integrity of the installation. Upon approval, the building owner places the appropriate key for the main access entrance and life safety systems inside the box. The Fire Department Inspector installs the lock, closes the door and locks the box.

A KnoxBox is designed to contain only the key to the main entrance of the building and life safety systems. As an additional security precaution, a building-wide pass key is not recommended for placement in any access key box.

Schedule your inspection appointment by contacting the Seattle Fire Prevention Division email, [SFD\\_FMO\\_KnoxBox@seattle.gov](mailto:SFD_FMO_KnoxBox@seattle.gov), or by calling (206) 386-1450. Future access to add or remove a key from the box should be coordinated by contacting our office to make an appointment.

## Installation Location

The building owner is responsible for proper installation of the KnoxBox. It must be securely mounted on the building exterior or to a free standing post at a general height of six feet, and within five feet of the primary Fire Department access point, such as an addressed main door or metal gate post. Installation instructions can be obtained by contacting our office. Additional installation

diagrams are included with every box, and online at [www.knoxbox.com](http://www.knoxbox.com). Any deviation from the published Seattle installation instructions must be pre-approved by the Fire Prevention Division Inspector.

## One- and Two-Family Residences

In order to be approved for residential use, the KnoxBox must be installed to meet the same installation criteria established for commercial buildings.

## Gates

In certain situations, it may be possible to properly and safely install a KnoxBox to control a mechanically powered gate. However, all proposals to install a Knox Box to house a key or gate switch require prior review and approval by the Seattle Fire Prevention Division Inspector.

## Inspection Fee

During the inspection, the purchaser completes an Inspection Agreement which authorizes the Seattle Fire Department to invoice an inspection fee of \$286 (current as of 2019) per box. This fee offsets costs for box inspection, installing the lock core, future trips to remove or add keys, and administrative services for handling and administering the Knox program. While the Knox Rapid Entry System is the only emergency access key box approved by the City of Seattle, it is still optional to have an emergency access key box unless directed by the Fire Marshal.

Employees of the Seattle Fire Department may not be involved with direct sale or installation of the Knox Rapid Entry System or any Knox Company product.

## Status of Non-Knox Rapid Entry System Key Boxes

When a building owner has voluntarily provided a key box and the box is not a KnoxBox/KnoxVault, the owner will be asked if he/she still desires the Fire Department to have key access to the occupancy. If the answer is yes, the owner will be directed to replace the existing key box with a Knox key box. The Fire Department will no longer use any access key box other than the Knox Rapid Entry System.

## Elevator Key Boxes

The Seattle Building Code requires that a key box be installed near elevators to hold keys necessary for access to elevator machinery and controls. For elevators with

Phase I recall, the key box must be located on the designated recall floor, above the recall switch. When no recall feature exists, the elevator key box should be located above the elevator call button, approximately six feet above the floor level.

The elevator key box may contain keys for the machine room door, secondary level door, pit door, roof door, fire emergency service, hoistway access, mechanical hoistway access devices and miscellaneous switch keys. An elevator key box can be obtained from most locksmiths.

Installation of Elevator Key Boxes are governed and inspected by the Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections and will follow the Seattle Building Code (SBC) below:

For existing installations, the elevator key retainer box must meet SBC Section 3011.

For new installations, the elevator key retainer box must meet SBC Section 3016.

Any questions or concerns regarding the installation of elevator key boxes should be directed to the Elevator Support Staff at (206) 684-0580.

### Contacts

If you have questions about requirements for the Knox Rapid Entry System, or need to schedule an appointment to finalize installation of your Knox key box, contact our office during regular business hours.

Seattle Fire Prevention Division

KnoxBox Team

(206) 386-1450

[SFD\\_FMO\\_KnoxBox@seattle.gov](mailto:SFD_FMO_KnoxBox@seattle.gov)

The Knox Company may be reached at (800) 552-5669 or [www.knoxbox.com](http://www.knoxbox.com)