

Seattle Permits

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

Fire Safety Inspections for Nightlife Venues and Entertainment Establishments

Updated October 2019

The Seattle Fire Code contains specific requirements for event venues, bars and nightclubs. Some of those requirements relate to the physical building, for example, sprinkler systems are commonly required. Other requirements relate to how the building is maintained and operated. This Client Assistance Memorandum provides a summary of key requirements and restrictions supporting the safe use and operation of nightclubs and entertainment establishments. It also provides information about what to do if you receive a correction notice or citation during an inspection by the Seattle Fire Department.

Requirements for Clubs and Entertainment Establishments (Place of Assembly Occupancies)

1. A sign identifying the “occupant load” or the approved number of people for each assembly area is required to be posted near the main entrance to that assembly area. The occupant load number in the sign must match the approved occupant load from the Certificate of Occupancy. For more information about Certificates of Occupancy see: <http://www.seattle.gov/fire/business-services/permits#annualassemblyoccupancies>.
2. A valid Seattle Fire Department place of assembly permit must be conspicuously posted if the place of assembly has an occupant load of 100 or more persons, or 50 or more if candles or open flames are being used.
3. Crowds are not allowed to exceed the posted

occupant load.

4. During hours of operation, all exit doors must remain unlocked and unblocked. Exit doors must be easily opened without the use of a key or special knowledge.
5. All fire protection systems, including fire alarms, fire sprinklers, range hoods and fire extinguishers have the proper tags showing they are current on their inspection, testing and maintenance requirements.
6. Exit doors and pathways are visible, adequately lit and unobstructed. Obstacles used for crowd control such as I.D. checkpoints or ropes and stanchions do not block or restrict exits in any way.
7. Use of candles is permitted when following permit conditions.
8. Pyrotechnics are not allowed, except with a valid Seattle Fire Department Pyrotechnic Permit.
9. Interior decoration, draperies and sound proofing materials meet flame spread or flame resistant standards. Approved documentation by the manufacturer or a commercial fire proofing company is available on the premises indicating materials meet the required standards.
10. Extension cords may not be used as a substitute for permanent wiring.

Flame Resistant Requirements of Decorative Materials

Decorative materials in assembly occupancies are required to be flame resistant in accordance with national standards, such as those established by National Fire Protection Standard 701, California State Fire Marshal or Canvas Products Association International-84. Decorative materials include wall hangings, draperies, curtains, banners and other decorations. Dining tablecloths are not considered decorative material and are not required to have proof of flame



resistance.

Documentation by the product manufacturer or a certificate of flame resistance by a commercial flame proofing company is required as proof of flame resistance for combustible decorative materials. It is not acceptable to treat decorative materials yourself by applying a flame resistant coating treatment. Consult the yellow pages or on-line directories for flame proofing services.

Emergency Procedures

An emergency plan identifying exit routes, staff duties, quarterly employee drills and fire safety equipment is required for new occupancies, and recommended for existing public assemblies.

Please see SFD [Client Assistance Memoranda #5051 and #5062](#) for additional information.

Fire Department Inspections and Enforcement

Seattle Fire Department inspectors will perform daytime inspections as part of our annual building inspection program. In addition, the City of Seattle's Joint Enforcement Team conducts inspections in the evenings when nightlife venues and entertainment establishments are open. If a violation of the Seattle Fire Code is found during one of these inspections, you will receive a correction notice or a citation from the fire code official. In situations with high immediate safety hazards, where listed requirements are not met, the Fire Marshal or a Fire Department Officer may shut down an event and/or evacuate an establishment until concerns are addressed and remedied.

The correction notice will establish a date for compliance. The Seattle Fire Department Fire Prevention Division will re-inspect to confirm that the violations have been resolved. Re-inspections to confirm compliance have a fee of \$373.

Some violations present hazards that must be remedied immediately and these violations will often receive a citation rather than a correction notice. A citation is a non-criminal notice of violation that includes a monetary penalty of \$373 for the first violation, and \$746 for subsequent violations in a 12-month period. Citations will be mailed to you or served in person. If you receive a citation, you must respond within 15 calendar days in one of three ways:

1. Pay the citation.

2. Request a mitigation hearing to explain the circumstances. In some cases, a mitigation may result in a lower penalty. The mitigation hearing must be requested in writing using the citation form mailed/served to you. Before a mitigation hearing occurs, you must correct the violations.
3. Request to contest the citation, if you believe the cited violation did not occur or that the person cited is not responsible for the violation. The hearing to contest the citing must be requested in writing using the citation form mailed/served to you.