

Seattle Permits

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

High Rise Fire Emergency Planning Requirements

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The City of Seattle classifies a high rise as any building that has occupied floors 75 feet or higher above Fire Department access. High rise buildings, because of their height and the large number of people they may contain, are required to follow a number of fire safety regulations relating to preparation and training of people within the building. These requirements are contained in Chapter 4 and Chapter 93 of the 2012 Seattle Fire Code (SFC).

Fire Safety Director

Each high rise building is required to have a Fire Safety Director appointed by the building owner. The Fire Safety Director is responsible to oversee the preparedness and initial response of a building's fire and life safety systems and building occupants to a fire alarm.

The Fire Safety Director's responsibility is to prepare for and manage possible fire emergencies until the Fire Department arrives to assume control of the incident. The primary action of the Fire Safety Director during a fire emergency is to report to the building emergency control center (panel) to direct the building's emergency response. In addition, the Fire Safety Director meets the responding fire company to advise them on the status of the alarm and the building's fire protection systems. Resources for Fire Safety Directors can be found at: <http://www.seattle.gov/fire/safety-and-community/workplace-fire-safety>.

Fire Safety and Evacuation Plan

Each high rise building in Seattle is required to have a fire safety and evacuation plan that details actions by building occupants and staff during a fire emergency. This document should be developed in accordance with

Section 404.2.2 of the 2012 Seattle Fire Code.

Additional information can be found in Client Assistance Memo #5051, Fire Safety and Evacuation Plans.

Emergency Evacuation Drills

All high rise buildings are required to conduct emergency evacuation drills on an annual basis, in accordance with SFC Section 405.

Additional information on high rise drills can be found in Client Assistance Memo #5963, High Rise Emergency Evacuation Drills.

Floor Wardens

High rise buildings with more than 100 employees must also have floor wardens as part of the high rise building response team. Owners of buildings and/or tenants with over 100 employees are required to designate a floor warden for each floor. Floor wardens are usually recruited from among the building tenants. Their role is to help with the evacuation of building occupants. There is an exception to the requirement for floor wardens. Residential condominiums and apartments not employing staff are not required to have floor wardens, although they are strongly encouraged.

Floor wardens should participate in training at least once a year. They should also be involved in your building's emergency evacuation drills. Training assistance, in the form of lesson plans, handouts, and videos, is available on the Seattle Fire Department's website at <http://www.seattle.gov/fire/safety-and-community/fire-and-life-safety-handouts>.

Controlled Evacuation

Evacuation of a high rise building during a fire emergency can be a major undertaking. For the majority of high rise buildings, the fire alarm only sounds on those floors in the direct vicinity of the fire. This allows those individuals who are at most direct risk to exit the area as quickly as possible. This is called a controlled



evacuation.

It is important to have a controlled evacuation because:

- Evacuating all floors at once may create serious back-ups in the stairwells. This may not only impede prompt exiting from the building, but also slow the access of firefighters to the fire.
- Stairwell pressurization could be lost if all doors were open at the same time.
- There is no immediate need to evacuate more people than are directly threatened. The following controlled evacuation procedures are recommended for most buildings:
 - The alarm must sound on a minimum of the fire floor and the floor above and below. You may add floors to this alarm sequence at your discretion, but you may not go below the minimum.
 - Standard evacuation instructions are to exit the floor using the stairwells, go down four floors, and re-enter the building. Wait for further instructions.
 - A very important point to be made with these instructions is that you should never enter onto a floor where the alarm is sounding. If it is, continue down the stairs to floor and location where the alarm is not sounding.
 - The bottom five floors evacuate to the outside of the building when they hear the alarm and go to the designated outside meeting place.

Related Information

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

- #5051 Fire Safety and Evacuation Plans
- #5963 High Rise Building Emergency Evacuation Drills
- #5971 Testing of Fire Protection Systems

SFD CAMs can be accessed here: <http://www.seattle.gov/fire/firecode>.

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