

Seattle Permits

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

Fire Safety Requirements and Inspections for Nightlife Venues and Entertainment Establishments

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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 code requirements and restrictions. 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 must have the proper tags showing they are current on their inspection, testing and maintenance requirements.
6. Exit doors and pathways must be visible, adequately lit and unobstructed. Obstacles used for crowd control such as I.D. checkpoints or ropes and stanchions must 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 must meet flame spread or flame resistant standards. Approved documentation by the manufacturer or a commercial fire proofing company must be 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 for 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 online directories for flame proofing services.

Emergency Plans and Procedures

An emergency plan identifying exit routes, staff duties, quarterly employee drills and fire safety equipment is required for new occupancies and existing occupancies with an occupant load of 100 or greater. Plans are recommended for existing public assemblies. Nightclubs with an occupant load of 100 or more are always required to have a fire safety and evacuation plan. Please see SFD [Client Assistance Memorandum #5051](#) for information on emergency plans. In addition to these general requirements, nightclubs are also required to provide a detailed seating plan, occupant load, and occupant load limit as part of their emergency plan.

Fire Sprinklers Requirements for New and Existing Nightclubs, Restaurants and Bars

Washington State and Seattle Building and Fire Codes require that an automatic sprinkler system be provided throughout all newly constructed and existing group A-2 "nightclubs". If you construct, use or convert a building or structure to a "nightclub" as defined by the Seattle Fire Code, you must meet all the code requirements for a night club.

A "nightclub" is defined as an A-2 Occupancy use in which the aggregate area of concentrated use of unfixed chairs and standing space that is specifically designated and primarily used for dancing or viewing performers exceeds 350 square feet, excluding adjacent lobby areas.

"Nightclub" does not include theaters with fixed seating, banquet halls, or lodge halls. Newly constructed banquet halls, restaurants or bars not meeting the definition of "nightclub" but classified as A-2 Occupancy must install fire sprinklers where any one of the following applies:

- The fire area exceeds 5,000 square feet, or
- The occupant load equals 100 or more, or
- The fire area is located on a floor other than the level of exit discharge (does not apply to fire areas that include space located one floor above the level of exit discharge if the occupant load of the upper floor is less

than 50).

Businesses currently operating in a manner that meets the definition of nightclub would not be subject to the sprinkler requirement if they alter their business operation in a manner so that they no longer meet the criteria listed in the nightclub definition.

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 also **shut down an event and/or evacuate an establishment** until concerns are 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 \$433.

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 \$433 for the first violation, and \$866 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.