

Seattle Fire Prevention Division

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Requirements and Exemptions Related to Testing and Maintenance of Fire Alarms and Sprinklers in Townhouses and One- and Two-Family Dwellings

What Is a Townhouse and a Townhouse Unit?

A **townhouse** is a building that contains three or more attached townhouse units. A **townhouse unit** is a single-family dwelling unit in a townhouse that extends from foundation to roof and that has a yard or public way on not less than two sides that extends at least 50 percent of the length of each of these two sides.

Testing and Maintenance Requirements for Fire Alarms and Sprinklers in Seattle

- Depending on their size and other characteristics, some one- or two-family dwellings and some townhouses require fire alarms or sprinkler systems.
- All new code-required fire alarms and sprinklers require “acceptance testing” with SFD at time of installation.
- All fire alarms and sprinklers require annual testing. Specifically, the [Seattle Fire Code](#) (SFC) requires that the building owner ensure they are properly inspected each year, and maintained in working condition. Failure to do so is a violation of the SFC (see 2021 SFC 901.6 and Table 901.6.1 and SFD [Administrative Rule 9.02](#)).
- **Exception relevant for townhouses and one- and two-family dwellings:** Some sprinkler systems do not require annual testing but they do require building owners to maintain them in proper working order. These are “NFPA 13D” or “P2904” systems. The [building permit](#) that was issued when your building was constructed will document what type of sprinkler system is stalled in your townhouse.

Who is Responsible for Ensuring Fire Alarm and Sprinkler Inspections, Testing and Maintenance?

- The Seattle Fire Code makes the building owner responsible for complying with the code, including testing and maintenance requirements.
- In a townhouse, if a single system serves multiple units, then the various owners of the townhouse units are jointly responsible and should work together to comply with the code.

Who is Allowed to Perform Inspections, Testing and Maintenance on Fire Protection Systems?

- Sprinklers: In one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses with the 13D or P2904 sprinkler types, the building owner may perform maintenance. Other sprinkler systems of types 13 or 13R must be tested and maintained by an SFD-certified sprinkler technician.
- Fire Alarms: Must be inspected, tested and maintained by an SFD-certified fire alarm technician.

Do I Have to File Any Reports with the Seattle Fire Department Regarding Inspections, Testing and Maintenance?

- No, reports for required testing or maintenance do not need to be submitted to SFD for one- or two-family residential dwellings, or any townhouses. This reporting exemption is provided for all fire protection and life safety systems, including fire alarms and sprinklers of all categories (NFPA 13, 13R, and 13D), in townhouses and one- and two-family dwellings.
- It is acceptable if your contractor does file reports on your behalf. This is not a problem, it is just not required.

- Although reporting is not required, the Seattle Fire Code requires you to keep records of any testing, maintenance and repairs that occurred, and provide them to our inspectors upon request.
- Although reporting is not required, **if the Seattle Fire Department is notified of a violation, or if our personnel observes a violation of the fire code, we will follow up in accordance with our usual protocols.**